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## **Bad Governance, Citizens' Resistance and State Repression: A Study of the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The symbiotic relationship between the state and citizens presupposes that the former is responsible for providing security, maintaining law and order, and ensuring the welfare of the latter. Yet, recurring years of failed promises, bad governance and economic hardship have led to citizens' distrust of government, sparking some resistance from citizens in Nigeria. The dissent by citizens against bad governance and economic hardship is further met by state repression. This study relied on a mixed methodology and adopted the neo-Marxist theory of the state to interrogate the dynamics of State repression and citizens' resistance in Nigeria. The popular uprisings of #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests are used as veritable instances. The study established that the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in 2020 and 2024 respectively, emerged as a significant form of citizens' resistance against bad governance, police brutality and state repression in Nigeria. The government's response, including the use of force against protesters, drew international condemnation and raised concerns about the state of democracy and human rights in Nigeria. The study also concludes that the persistent use of repressive measures by the state has had profound implications for Nigeria's democracy, development, and national security. It was recommended among others that there is a need for more democratic and non-repressive approaches to conflict resolution, citizens' concerns and governance.

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## **1. Introduction**

The universal acceptance of democracy as the best system of governance is incontestable. This is premised on the participatory opportunity democracy affords the citizenry in the selection and election of their leaders and representatives. It also guaranteed some recipe for good governance and the fundamental human rights of all law-abiding citizens. Democratic governance is, thus, representative, accountable and guarantees a variety of civic, political, social and economic rights. These enviable attractions, coupled with the global urge, precipitated Nigeria to return to democracy on May 29, 1999, after a prolonged military dictatorship. However, the envisaged opportunities and hope seem to have given way to illusion and bewilderment, more than 25 years of democratic governance in Nigeria.

Recently, Nigeria has witnessed a major rush in public dissatisfaction and citizen-led movements intended to challenge state practices professed as unfair and oppressive. Among the most prominent of these actions were the

#EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests, which came as dominant expressions of dissatisfaction against the nature of governance in Nigeria. The resistance was equally against police brutality, broader total corruption, harsh and unpopular economic policies that inflicted hardship and suffering on the citizens. These protests, primarily prearranged and motivated by Nigeria's youth, highlighted the rising intolerance of the state's failure to tackle the prevalent human rights abuses and bad governance (Akinwale, 2021; Okunola & Adegoke, 2022).

State repression and citizens' resistance have been recurrent issues in the country, with the government regularly resorting to violent quell on peaceful protests and discords (Aborishade, 2021). The EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests that swept over the country in 2020 and 2024 are a pitiful illustration of the fight back between the government and its citizens. State repression and citizens' resistance have been entangled in the struggle for social and political change. The EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests emphasize the difficult power dynamics and resistance in Nigeria, and the fight for societal change in the face of state repression.

This study examines the character of democratic governance in Nigeria that gave rise to the EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. It seeks to interrogate the approval rating of the government by citizens in Nigeria. The study will draw an incisive conclusion on the character of democratic governance, citizens' well-being and offer recommendations for improving the protection of human rights and promoting democratic governance in the country.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification**

### **2.1 Citizens' Resistance**

Citizenship can be defined as a relationship between an individual and state wherein the citizen owes allegiance to the state and the state, in turn provides protection and rights. Marshall (1950) describes citizenship as a status that confers civil, political, and social rights on individuals within a society. While civil rights pertain to the right to freedom of speech, freedom of movement, and the right to own property, political rights include the right to vote and participate in the political process. More so, economic, social, and cultural rights encompass access to social services such as education, healthcare, and social security. Stated differently, economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) include the rights to adequate food, to adequate housing, to education, to health, to social security, to take part in cultural life, to water and sanitation, and to work (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA, 2017). Therefore, citizenship is a legal status that confers certain rights and responsibilities on individuals who are recognized as members of a specific country or nation. It is a complex and multifaceted concept that varies from country to country but typically includes rights such as the right to vote, the right to work, the right to live in the country, and access to social services. Citizenship also comes with responsibilities, such as obeying the laws of the country, paying taxes, and potentially serving in the military.

The concept of citizens' resistance can be defined as the various ways persons or groups within a state resist, oppose, challenge, or try to amend policies, practices, or decisions made powers-that-be. Thus, resistance can take different forms, ranging from peaceful protests and civic disobedience to more radical and drastic actions. It can also be seen as the shared actions taken by average people to confront repressive or unfair systems, policies, or practices through peaceful ways. More specifically, citizens' resistance can take diverse forms, such as protests, demonstrations, civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts, and other forms of nonviolent activism aimed at advocating for social, political, or economic change.

### **2.2 Governance**

Governance is a many-sided thought that embraces the methods, procedures, and arrangements by which the public, organizations, and institutions are directed, controlled, and held accountable. It has to do with the allocation of authority and power, the functions and responsibilities of different actors, and the machinery through which they are held accountable. Governance also entails the making and enforcement of, policies, rules and regulations that guide decision-making and performance. It includes the means, processes, and institutions through which individuals and groups communicate their well-being, apply their rights, convene their commitments, and reconcile their disparities.

For Egwu (2018), governance is about a government's ability to make and enforce rules and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not. He, however, posits that for effective development outcomes, the concern should go beyond running an effective and clean State to a framework of governance that is democratic. Similarly, Audu (2016) posits that governance encompasses all the aspects of the exercise of authority

through formal and informal institutions in the management of the resource endowment of a State. It denotes “the exercise of authority to provide public goods and services, including the delivery of basic services, infrastructure, and a sound climate” (Audu, 2016, p. 31). Simply captured, governance is the exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a State’s affairs. It entails how citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights, and meet their obligations. Thus, governance demands participation, transparency, responsiveness, and accountability. To be effective, good governance precedes the rule of law and ensures that political, social, and economic priorities are based on a broad consensus in society, and the yearnings and voices of all, especially the disadvantaged, minorities, and vulnerable groups, are heard and reflected in decision-making.

### **2.3 State Repression**

Generally, repression is the act of subduing someone or a group of people by institutional or physical force. To Davenport (2007), state repression includes harassment, surveillance/spying, bans, arrests, torture, and mass killing by government agents and/or affiliates within their territorial jurisdiction. Acts of state repression often violate fundamental human rights and constitute human rights abuses. In their view, Earl and Braithwaite (2022) see state repression as actions or policies that curtail or constrain any form of political engagement. They also maintain that these are state actions that affect any form of political participation, including both extra-institutional and institutional involvement. In other words, it refers to the state or private actions focused on preventing, limiting, or constraining protest or social movements. Suffice it to add that since the defining concept of the state is its monopoly on the legitimate use of coercion, those objectives of state repression may be related to quiescence and quelling of popular dissent (deMeritt, 2016). Consequently, state or political repression is the maltreatment of an individual or group for political reasons, especially to limit or forbid their ability to take part in the political life of society. It often is evidenced in the form of human rights violations, surveillance abuse, police brutality, imprisonment, involuntary settlement, stripping of citizens' rights, lustration and violent action such as murder, summary executions, torture, forced disappearance and other extrajudicial punishment of political activists, dissidents, or the general population.

State repression can be defined as the measures taken by government establishments to limit, control, or restrain the political rights, civil liberties, and freedoms of individuals or groups. Repression can be evident in a variety of forms, with the use of force, suppression, scrutiny, and lawful limitations, frequently to sustain power, control disputes, and avert political instability or instability. State repression as a concept is essential for understanding the dynamics between governments and citizens, particularly in totalitarian administrations; it is, however, observed in egalitarian societies under particular conditions (Asogwa et al., 2022). So, State repression is the use of force or violence by a government or state authority to control or suppress its citizens, either individuals or groups, whom they see as a threat to their interests, wishes, aspirations, and power.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study draws on neo-Marxist theory of the State. Neo-Marxist theory provides a useful framework for understanding the character of governance, citizens’ resistance, and the state in the context of protests such as EndSARS and EndBadGovernance in Nigeria. Profoundly, Neo-Marxism is a theory developed by Western scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, Antonio Gramsci, Andre Gunder Frank, Robert Cox and Johan Galtung during the mid and the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This theory was developed in response to the growing changes post-industrialization. This theory has managed to incorporate the changes in the 20th century. This theory also tried to respond to the unlikely probability of the world socialist revolution (Cox, 1981). Yet, it still retains the principles of Marxism, like economic determinism, inequality, and exploitation. These scholars believe that the state serves as an instrument of the ruling class to maintain and perpetuate the existing social order, which is characterized by inequality and exploitation. State repression is therefore seen as a means by which the ruling class seeks to suppress dissent and sustain its desire to hold power.

The Neo-Marxist theory, which extends and adapts classical Marxist thought to modern social and political situations, stressed the functions of the state in maintaining the interests of the ruling class and the capitalist system, often through duress and ideological control. Be that as it may, the protests also exposed the potential for citizens' resistance

against state repression. Neo-Marxist theory emphasizes the agency of the working class and other marginalized groups in challenging the status quo and advocating for social change (Gramsci, 1971).

This idea is driven by Marx's definition of state in the communist manifesto as the executive of the modern state and the committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. However, scholars of third world countries like Alavi (1972), Ake (1985), Ekekwe (1986), amongst others, have expanded this theory of the state. Their assumptions have illuminated the basic characteristics of the state in post-colonial societies and have equally provided enlightenment regarding the state's human rights violations. The basic assumption of the theory is that post-colonial states are products of colonialism and, as such, have followed the developmental patterns dictated by the interest of the imperial masters and their local partners rather than the interests of the majority of the indigenous population (Asogwa et al. 2022).

In the case of the EndSARS protest in Nigeria, which appears to be a reaction to police brutality and the quest for police reform, the state replied with violence and repression. The government of Nigeria deployed security forces to violently repress the protests, resulting in the loss of lives and injuries to protesters. This shows how the state, working for the happiness of the ruling elite, employs a repressive strategy to subdue dissent and keep up its power. So, the EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria can be seen as expressions of citizens' resistance against repressive state machinery that serves the interests of the ruling class.

The government of Nigeria has been condemned for its corruption, resource mismanagement, and inability to address the desires of the people. These matters are vital to neo-Marxist study, which stresses the role of the state in perpetuating inequalities, mistreatment, and exploitation. So, the dynamic of citizens' resistance and state repression in the context of protests such as EndSARS and EndBadGovernance in Nigeria can be explored through a neo-Marxist theory. Suffice it to add that the neo-Marxist theory proffers a tough framework for understanding the character of governance, citizens' resistance, and state repression from the perspective of the EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. These protests also manifest as a form of class struggle against bad governance, economic inequality, and structural coercion. More so, the neo-Marxist perspectives can afford important insights into the power dynamics, allocation of resources, and inherent injustices that instigate protests against political corruption, police brutality, and social inequality in Nigeria. For instance, Harvey (2017) explored the role of capitalism, neoliberalism, and globalization in creating circumstances of exploitation, poverty, and social disorder that can lead to mass protests and resistance movements (Harvey, 2017). Through the analysis of unequal distribution of wealth and power in Nigerian society through the neo-Marxist lens, researchers can better appreciate the roots of dissatisfaction and mobilization among marginalized groups in the quest for social change.

Criticism of neo-Marxist theory in the context of studying protests like EndSARS and EndBadGovernance in Nigeria came from different points of view. One familiar criticism is that neo-Marxist analysis tends to oversimplify difficult social events by economic factors at the detriment of other pertinent aspects like culture, identity, and individualism. Critics also argued that this narrow focus on class struggle may ignore other forms of structural inequality and fail to account for actors, motivations, and tactics involved in social movements. Another criticism of neo-Marxist theory is that its deterministic viewpoint states that social change is primarily driven by economic factors and class conflict, leading to some extent mechanical understanding of historical development. This deterministic view may ignore the role of emergency, agency, and cultural factors in determining social movements and producing transformative change.

#### **4. The Character of Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

The return of Nigeria to democratic governance in 1999 provided the opportunity to overturn widespread developmental and political problems associated with prolonged military rule and, simultaneously, a hope of great expectations of improved quality of wellbeing and governance. As argued by Ezonbi et al (2017), the benefits of democracy could be seen in its institutions and predictable transition timelines. Accordingly, the constitutional nature of the state and governmental machinery regulates the political process, especially regarding the transitions from one government to another. It is also taken for granted that democratic constitutions offer conditions for the rule of law to subsist. In the rule of law are found guarantees for personal freedoms, the right to associate freely, and the right to freedom of expression. It is apt to submit that Nigerians have enjoyed these rights and privileges since 1999, albeit with challenges to their free expression from operators of the state.

Despite the many years after democratic rule, the huge expectations of most Nigerians have been largely undermined by poor governance, with its attendant socio-economic and political challenges. For example, the Nigerian economy is overwhelmed by the problems of poverty, widening income inequality between the rich and the poor, disinvestment, inflation, deindustrialisation, mass unemployment, and a debt crisis. Moreover, the crises of widespread collapse of social values, and infrastructure, illiteracy, insecurity of lives and property, political corruption, authoritarianism, electoral malpractices, politically motivated violence, and weak governance institutions continue to undermine the socio-political realm in Nigeria. No doubt, the disenchantment and disappointment of most Nigerians with the current democratic outcomes on their socio-political and economic wellbeing, as evident in the massive decline in popular trust in democratic institutions, processes, and political leadership, can be appropriately understood and situated. In other words, despite the seeming successes in democratic consolidation, governance in Nigeria, especially since the beginning of the Fourth Republic has been confronted in the main, by myriads of challenges amongst which are lack of large scale free, fair and credible election; lack of freedom of speech and publication; refusal to accept defeat in elections by political gladiators; inter and intra ethnic rivalries, religious crisis and insecurity, inadequate and weak democratic institutions, poverty, institutionalized corruption and attitude of political office holders to corner the wealth of the nation, disobedience to the rule of law, among others.

As Ake (1996) posits, Nigerians did not clamour for democracy simply because it is desirable, but because it is a form of government that will solve the basic problems of Nigerians. Yet, there is a shortage of basic human rights, especially the necessities of life. This has been a major hallmark of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Nigerians are noted in agitating against such democratic deficits as the infringement on basic human rights as free speech as epitomised by the clamp-down on the democratic space such as the ban on Twitter in the country by the President Muhammadu Buhari administration; the right to demonstrate against unpopular policies of government; and the short supply of basic dividends of democracy such as the provision of infrastructure like electricity, pipe borne water, food, good roads, etc. Specifically, the security of life and property is not a guarantee in Nigeria since 1999 when the Fourth Republic started. The country is enveloped by separatist agitations from various ethnic nationalities; the dare devil kidnapping for ransom in various parts of the country; religiously motivated killings; farmers-herders' violence; Boko Haram terrorism; banditry and the menace of armed herders' militia.

Furthermore, corruption has remained a hallmark of Nigeria's Fourth Republic and a major democratic deficit in the country. Nigeria has consistently recorded very high percentage indices in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Nigeria scored 26 points out of 100 on the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International. Corruption Index in Nigeria averaged 21.64 Points from 1996 until 2024, reaching an all-time high of 28.00 Points in 2016 and a record low of 6.90 Points in 1996 (Transparency International, 2024).

A basic democratic deficit in Nigerian politics is that, in Nigerian politics is not about competition of ideas. Indeed, it is an anathema to think of politics in Nigeria based on competitive ideas. Instead, politics in Nigeria is so commercialised that it is simply a display of who has the deepest pocket or sort of a race to control a casino (Tella, 2022). Politics in Nigeria is a race to control the 'casino' in the state house; a scenario that has enthroned money bags, godfathers, etc., who invest their ill-gotten wealth in sponsoring their godsons to control the casino in the state house. A worrisome aspect of this politics of commercialisation is that the competition is often bloody.

As Egbe and Muhammad (2024) affirm, the enormity of the aforementioned democratic deficits indicated that the country has not gotten it right in the Fourth Republic, just as it was in the three previous republics. The scholars further submit that whereas it is the preponderance of similar developments that instigated the military to topple Nigeria's earlier republics, by dint of luck, the Fourth Republic is fortunate to have a submissive military institution; a submissiveness the political class has not built on to do things rightly for once. Similarly, Tella (2022) posit that democratic governance in the Fourth Republic to a large extent has failed to 'guarantee minimum conditions of governance, deliver democratic dividends, and development. They also aver that the failure of democratic governance is evident in the persistent cases of insecurity, employment, absence of social amenities like potable water, accessible health care, roads infrastructure, quality education, among others.

It is obvious from the foregoing that democratic governance in Nigeria is characterized by authoritarianism, electoral irregularities and malpractices, nepotism, insecurity, poverty, weak democratic institutions, abuse of human rights, institutionalized corruption, weak opposition parties and civil society organisations, silencing of opposition elements, among others. Scholars have converged on the conclusion that, democracy as it is currently practiced in Nigeria has produced unpalatable results. This is associated with the nature of the Nigerian state and the character of its elites (Fatoki & Ajayi, 2017).

### **5. Triggers to the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a country of paradoxes and some peculiar issues naturally build tensions and foster disillusionment among its citizenry. As Omilusi (2025) submits, for far too long, and indeed since the country's independence in 1960, Nigerian citizens have grappled with diverse forms of oppression, repression, and bad governance. These have been recurrently evident in the hostile and corrupt character of law enforcement institutions and agents, the poor record of the rule of law, the decadent condition of public infrastructure, and the abysmal state of educational systems and facilities, among other indicators. Thus, recurrent incidences of bad governance have left behind a society of people with a battered psyche. This has created a picture of Nigerians as a people who have come to accept the state and leaders as an unquestionable and unaccountable behemoth to whose chains and oppression they must submit. This attitude of resignation has emboldened successive batches of political leaders and public administrators to engage in uninterrupted looting ventures as they could plunder the "national cake" without any form of social resistance (Okoro, 2022).

Thus, organized unions and civil society formation, which generally served as a bastion of hope in ensuring public accountability from leaders, were effectively caged as patrons and cronies were either successively installed, or recalcitrant actors were cowed into submission or conformity by the corrupt state and its actors. As a tool for sustaining this strangulating relationship between leaders and the led, they have cultivated a disposition of hostility between the state and its citizens as chains of economically scotching policies are serially imposed on the masses. At the same time, political office holders profited increasingly from humongous self-serving statutory allocations and unofficial diversion of the commonwealth (So-oriori, 2023).

Consequently, mass impoverishment and unemployment, poor wages for the employed, outrageous charges for the few irregularly available services, absent public welfare support systems, outrageous and multiple public taxations, and constant imposition of austerity measures on the masses. All of these are in the midst of a flagrant exhibition of ostentatious living, diversion of public wealth, and widening inequality occasioned by bad governance and corruption of the political class. To remain secure while maintaining this age-long economic, social, and political dimensions of injustice to their advantage, the elite have created a separate world of security for themselves where the people are left exposed and vulnerable to various security menaces from kidnappers, herdsmen, armed robbers, bandits, cattle rustlers, ethnic militias and terrorists, all ravaging different parts of the country in proportions never before seen. It is in this context that the youths, from virtually all the ethnic communities, religious faiths, and regional zones, came out en masse in October 2020 and August 2024 to challenge the decades-long anomaly that characterises their existence.

### **6. The #EndSARS in Perspective**

The #EndSARS protest is a social movement that began in Nigeria in October 2020. It gained impetus and extensive support as a reaction to abuse of power, police brutality, extrajudicial killings, and corruption by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian police force. The movement was mainly motivated by young people, who had used social media platforms like Twitter (now X) and Instagram to organize protests and raise consciousness about police brutality and human rights abuses in Nigeria. The protest broke out on 8 October 2020 as a peaceful protest to disband a special unit in the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) called the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The protest gained popularity on social media via the hashtag #EndSARS. People took to the streets in cities across Nigeria (Akinwale, 2021). On 11 October 2020, protestors released a list of five basic demands to the Nigerian government:

- i. The immediate release of all arrested protesters;
- ii. justice for all those who died through police brutality and appropriate compensation for their families;

- iii. an independent body to investigate and prosecute all reports or complaints of police brutality within ten days;
- iv. Independent psychological evaluation and retraining of disbanded SARS officers before they can be redeployed; and
- v. Adequate increase in the salaries for officers of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) as appropriate incentives for carrying out their constitutional duties of protecting lives and properties.

As reported by Aniche and Iwuoha (2024), the protest was a decentralised social movement, yet, well-coordinated. Protesters were able to remain peaceful and non-violent despite provocations and infiltrations by government-sponsored thugs. The protestors prevented opposition political parties and politicians from hijacking the protest and resisted the ruling party or government's attempts to infiltrate and compromise protesters in the guise of negotiation. The protest was coordinated through various social media platforms, helpline centres, and an online radio station called Soro Soke (a Yoruba phrase that suggests speaking up). While it lasted, the protest garnered unprecedented support in and outside the country and rejuvenated traditional values such as unity, integration, communality and nationalism, which were either chequered or missing. The protest, which was organised and sustained by Nigerian youths, quickly morphed into a social movement that went beyond the primary demand for an end to police brutality in Nigeria, to demands for good governance (Ecoma, 2023).

### **7. An Overview of the #EndBadGovernance Protest in Nigeria**

The #EndBadGovernance protest, also called Nigeria's hunger protest, which erupted on August 1, 2024, was a manifestation of deep-seated frustrations among its citizens (Vanguard, 2024). Multiple factors, including the high cost of living, the fuel price hike, worsening economic conditions, and dissatisfaction with government policies drove the protest. It advocates for democratic values, decent leadership, and effective systems of checks and balances to avert corruption, dishonesty, and maladministration. Protesters rallied under the hashtag #EndBadGovernance, demanding not just economic relief but also transparency, accountability, and good governance. In the early days, protesters took to the streets in major cities across Nigeria. The initial turnout was significant, with citizens from various walks of life participating. The early days witnessed peaceful demonstrations, with chants and placards highlighting the economic hardships faced by many Nigerians.

It is noteworthy that the #EndBadGovernance protests represent a significant social movement aimed at addressing widespread corruption, poor governance, and systemic inefficiencies within government institutions in Nigeria. These protests, which have gained considerable traction through both physical demonstrations and digital activism, highlight the growing public discontent with government practices and demand for greater transparency, accountability, and reform. In the same vein, the socio-economic and political context is critical in understanding the emergence and dynamics of the #EndBadGovernance protests. High levels of unemployment, poverty, and inequality, coupled with perceived corruption and governance failures, create fertile ground for public discontent (Akanbi & Yusuf, 2024).

### **8. State Response to Citizens' Discontent in the EndSARS and EndBadGovernance Protests**

The #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria elicited varied responses from the government, an agency of the State. These responses, often framed within the context of maintaining national security and public order, significantly influenced the trajectory and impact of the protests. Akanbi and Yusuf (2024) submit that governments typically respond to protests through a combination of repression, accommodation, and strategic communication. The chosen response can depend on the political context, the scale and intensity of the protests, and the perceived threat to stability and governance. Repressive measures include the use of force, arrests, and legal actions against protestors. Governments may deploy police and military forces to disperse crowds, enforce curfews, and detain leaders and participants. Such measures aim to restore order but can also escalate tensions and violence.

The immediate response by the Inspector General of Police to the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria was to ban SARS and other special police units from patrolling and mounting roadblocks and directed that SARS officials should henceforth wear their uniforms so that they could be identified. The Nigerian government eventually responded by setting up the Presidential Panel on Police Reforms, which approved the five demands. Due to the protestors' lack of trust that the government would do as it said, the protests continued, demands became more political, and constitutional reforms were demanded beyond how the police operate.

More so, the Nigerian government tried to politicise the protest. They deployed a divide-and-rule strategy based on ethnicity and religion, equally making use of traditional rulers to dissuade their subjects from participating in the protests. As the #EndSARS protest grew organically online, the government resorted to strong-arm tactics. Aniche and Iwuoha (2024) maintained that the government tried to quell the peaceful protest through the use of tear gas, water cannons, and even live bullets. It sponsored thugs and recruited hoodlums to infiltrate and discredit the peaceful protest to make it appear violent to fulfill the rules of engagement, as various state governments imposed a justification to use force, and a twenty-four-hour curfew. Suffice it to add that the protests and resistance from the state culminated on 20 October 2020 at Lekki Toll, considered a rallying point in Lagos that was known for its police harassment. Here, the Nigerian Army opened fire and killed between twelve and fifteen people. The disconnection of the CCTV and streetlights a few hours before the shooting indicates that it was pre-planned (Ecoma, 2023).

Before the military repression, which reportedly had the backing of the government, the announcement of the government's commitment towards justice and accountability during the protest was simultaneously followed by attacks on peaceful protesters by security forces. As reported by Ecoma (2023), security forces repeatedly and unjustifiably responded with excessive force and arrested dozens of protesters, held them incommunicado for many hours or days, denied them access to lawyers, and filed trumped-up charges against them. Similarly, the bank accounts of individuals and groups who donated to, received or disbursed funds for the protest were frozen, travel restrictions were placed on supporters, and media houses were fined for using social media footage in their protest coverage.

Again, the Nigerian government called on the protesters to withdraw and to give peace a chance and to allow them to consider their demands. The protesters heeded the call and issued a five-point demand in addition to the initial demand for the disbandment of the SARs across police formations. To cushion the outrage over the killing of protesters the police and state governments placed a ban on public protest and processions and also imposed curfew across some states. Although it maintained the right of citizens to peaceful protest it however insisted that the reason for restricting protest activities was because the hitherto genuine and peaceful protest had been hijacked by hoodlums. Amidst the destruction across the nation the Nigerian President, Mohammadu Buhari addressed the nation and was largely silent on the shooting of the protesters at the Lekki toll gate.

However, several meetings were held between the representatives of the federal government and other stakeholders, including State Governments. The federal government after a series of meetings with the state governors, resolved to establish a judicial panel of inquiry on police brutality to pacify the protesters. To further curtail the effects of the protest and hooliganism, some state governments rolled out several incentives to the youths.

Furthermore, the government's response to the End Bad Governance protests was swift, as security operatives were deployed in large numbers across various cities. As the protests gained momentum and spread across regions in Nigeria, it was met by the government's heavy-handed response. Security forces began dispersing crowds, leading to several arrests and reports of excessive force. Again, the Department of State Services (DSS) arrested individuals accused of sponsoring and tailoring the use of the Russian flag during the protests. The appearance of Russian flags at some protest sites fueled concerns about foreign influence, and calls for regime change emerged, prompting the government to label such demands as treasonous (Vanguard, 2024). Meanwhile, President Tinubu called on Nigerians to suspend the protests and engage in dialogue to address their grievances, emphasizing the need for a peaceful resolution to the unrest.

The government's response to the protests underscores the tension between the state and civil society. Authorities viewed the protests as a significant threat to national stability, with allegations of foreign involvement, cryptocurrency funding, and potential hijacking by violent elements. Security forces, particularly the military, were deployed in several instances, resulting in violent clashes. This heavy-handed approach did little to quell public anger and may have exacerbated tensions between citizens and the state (Akanbi & Yusuf, 2024). The Nigerian government's

response to the EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests offers insight into the state's approach to dissent and desire for reform. The reaction was characterised by a mixture of concessions, repressive measures, and attempts at public relations management.

### **9. Implications of the Government's Clampdown on Citizens' Dissent**

The state repression and clampdown on peaceful, unarmed protesters have serious implications for democracy, development, and national security in Nigeria. It is therefore not surprising that Nigeria lamentably competes at the bottom of the Global Democracy Index rankings. Nigeria is classified as a nation of hybrid democracy. As of 2022, Nigeria's democracy achieved 4.23 points. According to Sasu (2024), the index is based on electoral process and pluralism, government functions, political participation, and culture, as well as civil liberties. Electoral process and pluralism attained 5.17 points. However, Nigeria received very low scores in government functioning, political participation, civil liberties, and political culture, which were all below four points.

The poor democratic atmosphere in Nigeria generally creates a difficult habitat for good governance and functional democracy, thus lowering public trust and confidence in the state and its leadership, thereby increasing popular dissatisfaction and negative perceptions of democracy. Again, the protesters' demand for wider political reforms did not lead to positive change but attracted state repression and clampdown on protesters through their actors – the Nigerian Police Force, Nigerian Army, and sponsored hoodlums who infiltrated the protests. Deleterious instruments of warfare such as tear gas, water cannons, live bullets, and other forms of brutal force were reportedly used on unarmed protesters (Akanbi & Yusuf, 2024; Aniche & Iwuoha, 2024; and Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022).

Notably, state repression and clampdown on protesters induced gross violations of human rights and remain a major threat to the democratic ethos in Nigeria. The people's right to life, liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of self-dignity, freedom to good wellbeing, etc. were all cut short by the Nigerian state's repressive actions during the protests (Okunola & Adegohe, 2022).

It is noteworthy that Nigeria ranks among the top seven countries with the highest level of citizen distrust of government institutions (World Economic Forum, 2018). Hence, the repressive character of the Nigerian state expressed in the form of police brutality, use of force, suppression of the media and opposition elements, with the accompanying poor human development indices (HDIs), combine to create the conditions for the incessant civil rights movements and youth restiveness, including the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests. Hence, a vehement people's movement against the state as a result of eroding and low public trust of the state institutions in Nigeria underlies the protests to end SARS and police brutality. Suffice it to add that the social contract between the people and the state collapsed as a result of the latter's proven track record of bad leadership, poor governance, corruption and lack of accountability, as well as its consistent use of public resources to encourage police brutality and repression. This indicates the extreme level of state intolerance against freedom of expression, gathering, movement, and right to life. Police brutality against the citizens has taken over as the key driver of shrinking civic space in Nigeria. Thus, state actors are rapidly exploiting the protests to clamp down on civic freedoms and push through restrictive measures (Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022).

As submitted by Iwuoha & Aniche (2022), State repression and clampdown on civil liberties have far-reaching implications for democracy, development, and national security in Nigeria. It depicts a high degree of human rights breaches. It contracts the civic spaces, endangers democracy and the rule of law, erodes constitutionalism, jeopardises national security, disrupts peace and people's wellbeing. It also frightens foreign investors, dwindles economic opportunities, and worsens hardship and poverty among citizens. Consequently, it triggers the emergence of armed groups and proliferation of SALW, breakdown of law and order, state of anarchy, looting and criminality, etc. The result of repressive responses from security forces in Nigeria against #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protesters is the erosion of the confidence of the Nigerian people, including those in the Diaspora. These developments seriously undermine Nigeria's democracy, development and national security.

Again, the heavy-handed approach and resort to the use of force by the government to repress citizens' discontent achieved little and rather exacerbated tensions between citizens and the state. More so, security analysts argue that the government's focus on maintaining order through force, rather than addressing the root causes of the protests, has led to an increase in public mistrust. In the context of Nigeria's fragile security environment, where insurgencies, kidnappings, and ethnic tensions already pose significant threats, the protests exposed further vulnerabilities within the national security framework. The perceived failure of the government to engage meaningfully with the protesters or initiate substantial reforms was seen as a missed opportunity to bridge the divide between the state and the citizenry.

The protests had an undeniable impact on Nigeria's national security landscape. In the immediate aftermath, the disruption of economic activities, attacks on public infrastructure, and clashes with security forces were clear indicators of the escalating crisis. However, the long-term implications could be even more profound. It is noteworthy that the protests exposed deep-rooted discontent with the democratic process, fueling calls for alternative governance models, including military intervention.

This disillusionment with democratic institutions, particularly among the youth, presents a potential risk for future instability. If left unaddressed, the grievances expressed during the #EndBadGovernance protests could resurface in more violent forms, threatening both political stability and national security. The government's failure to implement meaningful reforms or address the underlying socio-economic issues could lead to a cycle of unrest that further weakens the state's legitimacy. The role of the Nigerian diaspora in amplifying the protests internationally was significant. Solidarity marches in cities such as London, Washington, and Toronto brought international attention to the movement and increased scrutiny of Nigeria's human rights record. The international community, including human rights organisations like Amnesty International, condemned the government's response, calling for accountability for the excessive use of force by security agents (Businessday NG, 2024). This global pressure highlighted the interconnectedness of national protests and global governance concerns, signalling that the Nigerian government could no longer operate in isolation from international norms and expectations.

## **10. Conclusion and Recommendations**

These protests in Nigeria are a culmination of several structural and direct violence in the country. The country is plagued with bad governance, systemic corruption, lack of electricity and water, food scarcity, inflation of oil prices, unemployment, and abuse of power by the police. It is an equation for a failing or failed state. The hunger protest in Nigeria highlighted the pressing economic and governance issues facing the country. While it succeeded in drawing attention to these challenges, the protest's success was limited by the violence and controversial elements that accompanied it. Compared to #EndSARS, the hunger protest had a broader scope but faced a more immediate and severe government crackdown.

The EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria were significant movements that arose in response to widespread dissatisfaction with police brutality and systemic governance issues in the country. Therefore, the EndSARS and EndBadGovernance protests were instrumental in addressing longstanding issues of police brutality and poor governance in Nigeria. They marked a significant moment of civic engagement and activism among Nigerian youth, bringing pressing issues to national and international attention. The protests underscored the need for systemic reforms and greater accountability in the country's governance.

It is instructive to note that both the Nigerian state and its police force are implicated in police brutality in Nigeria. The Nigeria state established the security forces to primarily protect the interests of the ruling elites. The state thus became 'an instrument of private and sectional interests', and could not maintain appropriate conditions for civil rights protection. The Nigerian state through its coercive authorities such as the military and police force enforce rules and orders that serve the interests of the ruling elites rather than the people. These have negative consequences for democracy, development and national security in Nigeria. It results in a deficiency of citizens' trust in the state and its security institutions, and sometimes, citizens' open confrontation and attacks on security operatives.

The Nigerian government should work towards strengthening the various governmental institutions and ensuring transparency and accountability in governance. This includes ensuring free and fair elections, protecting the rights of citizens, and providing opportunities for citizen participation in decision-making processes. This will bring about the anticipated good governance in the country.

The Nigerian government should uphold the right to freedom of expression and ensure that citizens can peacefully protest and express their grievances without fear of reprisal. This includes protecting journalists and activists from harassment and intimidation.

To address the underlying grievances that have led to protests and resistance, the government should engage in dialogue with citizens and civil society organizations to address their concerns and work towards reconciliation. This includes addressing issues such as corruption, economic inequality, and marginalisation.

This study suggests that mainstreaming the oversight of the law enforcement agencies and establishing institutional mechanisms that control their excesses during the civil rights movement might help to control the excesses of the repressive state by keeping the security agents in check, thus preserving the civic spaces, promoting peace, democracy, development and effectively managing state-civil relations without violating human rights in Nigeria.

To transform the current distrustful state-citizen relations (informed by the repressive character of the state) and the overall dysfunctional socioeconomic conditions in Nigeria, holistic, far-reaching, and fundamental political reforms that transcend police reform are required.

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