

BEHIND THE UNIFORM: POLICE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AFTER #ENDSARS PROTESTS IN NIGERIA (2021-2023)

Abstract

Violence and abuse by those behind uniforms, especially the Nigeria Police, have continued to occupy a position of prime concern to Nigerians. Despite being a critical instrument relied on by the government in ensuring social control and enhancing governance, the Nigeria Police continues to receive prime attention from the Nigerian citizenry. This became very concentrated after the #EndSARS protests of October, 2020, that sought far-reaching police reforms. This study primarily explores police violence and abuse in Nigeria after the #EndSARS protests. Informed by the nature of the research problem, this study adopted the library research method and documentary evidence collected was subjected to detailed examination. The Social Conflict Theory and the Routine Activities Theory were adopted for analysis. The study found that police violence and abuse remain rampant in Nigeria because the police continue to work to preserve the status quo of inequality and exploitation in Nigeria. This situation is escalating despite the commitment of Nigeria to various treaties and international protocols which prohibit the application of violence and abuse in police work. The prospect of effective and efficient policing of Nigeria lies in closing the inequality gap in the Nigerian society. This will create the requisite environment that will enable the transformation of the Nigeria Police to an institution that eschews violence and abuse and is able to protect citizens.

Keywords: Violence, Uniform, Human Rights, Police, Abuse, EndSARS, Nigeria

Introduction

Violence and abuse by the police remains on the front burner in national discourse as one of the most pressing problems in Nigeria. The euphoria with which Nigerians had welcomed the return to civil rule in 1999 evaporated once it became evident that brutality by personnel of the Nigeria Police was escalating rather than abating. Nigerians were disappointed that the practice of democratic governance failed to ensure that those entrusted with exercising authority over the affairs of the citizens did not exercise this authority in a way that ensured that their rights were assured and protected. The constitution, national police codes, oversight institutions, international conventions and other institutional and structural mechanisms instituted and deployed to regulate the conduct of Nigeria Police in the course of maintaining public law and order (Lere and Luqman, 2018) failed to curb the quick recourse to violence and rights abuse by the police. The members of the Nigeria Police continued to demonstrate their inclination for harassment, extortion, brutality, torture and in the extreme, extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2014; Ogunode, 2015; Orunbon, 2020) all over the country. These series of violence and abuse experienced by the citizens, especially the youths, culminated into a spontaneous outpouring into the streets of many cities in Nigeria with a call on the government to disband a particular abusive police unit known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and to put an end to every other form of violence and abuse. This protest, tagged #EndSARS, took place in October 2020.

The #EndSARS protest was primarily a ubiquitous protest by the youths against the series of violence and abuse unleashed on Nigerians by the Nigeria Police, especially by the now infamous tactical unit known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). SARS grew to become a notorious unit of the Nigerian Police with a long record of violence and abuses. The #EndSARS protest was not limited to one geo-

political area of Nigeria or state or city. Rather, it was witnessed simultaneously in at least 26 states and more than 100 cities and towns across the country (WANEP, 2020). The two-week long protests saw a huge turnout of thousands of Nigerians, some of whom had been victims of the atrocities of this notorious police unit, and indeed police brutality in the country (Lawal and Ibrahim, 2021:3). A few days following the sporadic commencement of the protests in the country, security forces responded with excessive force, including gunfire, which resulted in deaths and severe injuries for an unknown number of protesters. George (2020) aptly described the response of the security forces in his assertion that in a darkness broken only by the blue light of cell phone screens, the sound of gunshots rang out as the army and police fired into a crowd of young people who had gathered at Lagos' Lekki Toll Gate to protest the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notoriously abusive arm of the police. This reaction of the police, aided by the military, signified the total commitment of the Nigeria Police to continuing their inclination for violence and abuse manifesting in form of harassment, extortion, brutality, torture and in the extreme, extrajudicial killings against Nigerians.

Protests have always been a handy and effective tool for the oppressed to elicit desired reforms and conducts from governments and their agencies all over the world. Fundamentally, the #EndSARS protests signified the attempt by Nigerians to take back their life and play a more active role in making it worth living. It was a spontaneous attempt by citizens, especially the youth, against police violence, abuses, brutality, etc. Despite the protests, Nigeria is still counted among the countries where violence and human right abuses are recorded daily and virtually in all human endeavors and these are mostly expressed in torture, extrajudicial killings, kidnapping, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention and extortion etc by government security operatives (Nnubia, 2021:vi). This study therefore explores the outcomes of the #EndSARS protests and how these have impacted on violence and abuse by the personnel of the Nigeria Police.

Theoretical Foundations

The Social Conflict Theory and the Routine Activities Theory are adopted for analysis in this study. The Social Conflict Theory is a Marxist oriented theory (Marx and Engels, 1848; Haralambos, 1995) which proposes that social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than by consensus and conformity. Simply put, power is concentrated in the hands of a minority in society and is employed to harass, intimidate and exploit the powerless thereby creating and consolidating divisions in the society. In other words, people with wealth and power endeavour to maintain the status quo by any means possible which involves, most of the time, suppressing people without power and wealth. Here, the state exists as an instrument of the dominant class and the police are used by this class to preserve the inequality and exploitation the dominant class perpetrates. Hence, members of the dominated class, who being economically marginalized and politically powerless, are subjected to police violence and abuse than the members of the dominant class who possess greater power, prestige and wealth. On the other hand, the Routine Activities Theory, propounded by Felson and Cohen (1979), postulates that offenders make choices about whether or not to commit a crime based on their access to a suitable target and the presence, or lack thereof, of capable guardianship that could potentially bring repercussions to the offender. The Nigerian environment of inequality and exploitation makes proper and effective supervision the Nigeria Police difficult thereby acting as a spur to police violence and abuse. The dominant class is so engrossed in its struggle to maintain its power, prestige and wealth to adequately supervise the police. Having knowledge of the dilemma of the dominant class, the Nigeria Police, motivated by pecuniary gains, utilizes such lapses or connivance to use their powers of coercion to victimize the poor and powerless.

#EndSARS Protests of October, 2020

The #EndSARS protests in Nigeria occurred in the month of October, 2020, after a SARS police officer reportedly shot a young Nigerian man in front of the Wetland Hotel in Ughelli, Delta State (Iwuoha and Aniche, 2021). The video of the incident trended on social media, leading to nationwide protests within a few days (Abati, 2020). Subsequently, and over a period lasting about two weeks, these protests organized around #EndSARS primarily as mass protests calling for a complete ban of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police, were witnessed in major cities across Nigeria. An overwhelming majority of those who participated in the protest were young Nigerians, males and females. The pent up anger of youths in Nigeria over the increasingly unfair profiling, violence, abuse, harassment and killing by members of SARS in particular became the fuel that kindled and conflagrated into the subsequent, spontaneous protests across the country.

Before the protests, there had been numerous documented cases of police violence and abuse in Nigeria. These included extrajudicial execution, torture, rape, physical assault, harassment, extortion, excessive use of force, abduction, unlawful arrest, illegal detention, and all forms of human rights abuses (Campbell, 2019; Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2000). In its 2016/2017 report, Amnesty International asserts that SARS officers routinely committed torture and other abuses against detainees, many of whom were arrested arbitrarily, detained incommunicado, and forced to 'confess' or pay bribes to secure their release. Amnesty International asserts further that investigations revealed a disturbing pattern of abuse of detainees in SARS custody despite the 2017 Anti-Torture Act. The report continued that in many cases, Amnesty International bore witness to the scars, bruises and dried blood on victims' bodies, many of who were subjected to beatings with sticks and machetes and denied medical care. Buttressing the above, Iwuoha and Aniche (2021) inform that Nigerians have, on many occasions, cried out about their brutal experiences in the hands of police officers and other security agents, including the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Despite these cries, the Federal Government was not seen to act to prosecute a single officer from the notorious Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) despite the anti-torture legislation that was passed in 2017 and several evidence that its members continued to use torture and other ill-treatment to execute, punish and extract information from suspects. These culminated in the birthing of the #EndSARS protests.

Although the protests were largely unstructured, the demands of the protesters were quite straightforward: the abolition of SARS, provision of justice to victims of police violence, abuses and brutality alongside a reform of the Nigeria Police. These demands were later widened to also include: an end to the pervasive failure of the government to deliver equitable economic prosperity for its citizens, especially the youths; respect for the rule of law by law enforcement agencies; respect for human rights and a deepening of democratic practice; improvement in educational and health systems; and job creation. According to Ojewale (2020), the message of the #EndSARS protests is that young Nigerians want to take back their country from the entrenched political order that they believe has not served their interests. Thus, the demands of the youths which began from calls for Police reforms later widened to include demand for extensive socio-economic and political reforms. In response to this call, the army and the police personnel opened fire on the protesters and in the process killed scores and injured several others on the night of the 20th of October, 2020. The report of the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Enquiry in its report released on 5th December, 2020, implicated the army and the Nigeria Police as participating 'in a massacre context' by opening fire on peaceful protesters with live ammunition'. Among its recommendations was the establishment of a special tribunal to address future abuse by security agencies. The focus of this study is on the impact of the #EndSARS protests on violence and abuse by the personnel of the Nigeria Police.

Police Violence and Abuse after the #EndSARS Protests in Nigeria

Ojo (2011:1) opines that “except in unusual circumstances when the services of soldiers are required, it is the police which the government relies on to secure compliance to existing laws, ensure conformity with precepts of social order and preserve the lives and properties of the people against every possible threat”. This assertion appears to be practiced in the opposite in Nigeria as police violence and abuse continues to thrive as a dangerous phenomenon in Nigeria society. Police brutality remains on the front burner in national discourse among the most pressing problems in Nigeria (Ole and Temitope 2022:1). More than two years after the #EndSARS protests, police violence and abuse still loom large in Nigeria. It also appears to be on the rise if one considers Lawal and Ibrahim’s (2021:14) assertion that “from physical assault to sexual harassment, brutal torture, illegal arrests, illegal and long-running detention without access to family and legal representation, physical brutalization, summary and extra-judicial killing, stealing of victims’ properties, robbery of supposed suspects and collusion with criminals to pervert the cause of justice, the litany of crimes of SWAT/SARS still make Nigerians to believe that the Police remains more of a state-sanctioned criminal gang than a crime-fighting police unit”.

The Nigeria Police continue to overstep the bounds of its duties by carrying on with its notoriety for violence and abuse. SWAT, which replaced the infamous SARS, continue to mount illegal roadblocks, conduct unauthorized checks and searches, arrest and detain people without warrant or trial, rape women, and extort young Nigerians for driving exotic cars (Kazeem, 2020). The fact therefore remains that the Nigerian Police have continued its enterprising reputation for violence, brutality, abuse, extortion and harassment. From the foregoing, it is deduced that the police have continued to uphold its legacy of pre #EndSARS arbitrary use of violence, abuse and brute force to perpetrate the same crime it was meant to combat. The conducts, appearance, and manner of operation of the Nigeria Police continue to manifest in the form of “a state terror gang than a crime-fighting unit of the police” (Lawal and Ibrahim, 2021:13). There is no proper identification system for the SWAT officers that replaced SARS officers and the rules of engagement for the officers remain unclear. In fact, citizens are more prone to believe that the police authority itself has lost focus and grip of the organization as the Nigerian Police “continues to embolden its sullied reputation for brutality manifested in harassment, extortion, rape, extrajudicial killings, accidental discharge, torture and other notorious acts against innocent citizens” (Ulo, 2021).

The following clichés have become standards used by Police to obfuscate reports of violence and abuse by its personnel: our men were on their normal patrol; the command deeply sympathizes with the family and friends of the victim(s); no stone will be left unturned; the Commissioner of Police has ordered an in-depth investigation into the circumstances surrounding; the DPO/CP/IGP calls for calm and assures the family/public that the perpetrators of this dastardly act will face the full weight of the law; police officers suspected to have carried out the act have been arrested; the police officers will be subjected to internal disciplinary proceedings; if found culpable, police officers will be charged to court, members of the public will be updated on the outcome of the investigation; etc. Despite all these, little or no action is seen to be taken by the police authorities and the supervising government. This goes to reinforce the belief that the brutality of unarmed Nigerians, especially the youth, by the Nigeria Police remains alarming and on the rise despite the #EndSARS protests in 2020.

In addition, access to lawyers or medical care for detainees continue to be delayed or denied based on the caprices of the police. This is in most cases despite requests by detainees for such access. Repeated requests by lawyers to be granted such access are delayed or denied by the police as well. Severe torture remains a routine practice commonly used by the police as a shortcut to solve many cases in Nigeria and to extract “confessions” or as a kind of punishment for alleged crimes (Amnesty, 2021).

Amnesty (2021) also asserts that examples of these can be attained from testimonies of many detainees in police custody indicating that they were subjected to torture, including hanging, shooting in the leg, beating with iron rods, punching and kicking, using pliers or electric shock and burning with cigarettes. They conclude that several persons continue to die from series of violence and abuse from officers of the Nigeria Police as shown in the table below. Often, these deaths occur in public spaces to the bewilderment of the people.

Table 1 :Dateline of Police Violence, Abuse and Killings in Nigeria Post #EndSARS Protests

DATE	VICTIM	LOCATION	INCIDENT	OUTCOME	STATUS	SOURCE/DATE
20/06/21	9 Victims	Enugu, Enugu State	Police inspector invaded Golf Estate and opened fire on people	5 people were killed and 4 injured	Inspector arrested and investigation commenced	NDTV 21/06/21
27/07/21	Saheed Ajibola Olabomi	Osogbo, Osun State	Was shot at by a team of Police men	Was hit and died from the gunshot fired by Police	No action known to have been taken by Nig. Police	ThisDay Newspaper 02/22
09/21	Monsurat Ojuade	Lagos State	Police shot through the gate into the compound where victim resides	Was hit and died from the gunshot fired by Police	Officer in Charge suspended and facing trial	Guardian Newspaper 18/10/21
11/21	Henry Ejiofor	Awgu, Enugu State	Police men stopped the vehicle he was travelling in from Owerri to Engu	Accused him of being a fraudster. Arrested and extorted by Police officers	No action from Nig. Police	ICIR 19/10/22
22/01/22	Paul Durowaiye	Kogi State	Shot for drinking sachet water belonging to Police officer	Died from gunshot injury from a Police officer	Police claim officer accused shot in self defense. No further action taken	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
04/03/22	Six Mobile Police Officers	Police College Qtrs, Maidugiri, Borno State	Police officer opened fire on colleagues	Six police officers died from gunshot wounds sustained. Two more injured	Officer arrested and detained at SCID	HumAngle 04/03/22
24/04/22	Igwe Odinaka and Chikere obieche	Gowon Estate, Lagos State	Police officer opened fire during a birthday party	Victims hit by bullets from gunfire and died	No known action by Nig. Police till date	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
04/22	Mark Chuks	Cherubim Junction, Owerri, Imo State	Accused of obstructing Policemen who were not in uniform and were in an unmarked bus	Brutalized and detained for one night by Police	No action from Nig. Police	ICIR 19/10/22
27/05/22	Emmanuel Joseph	Cultural Centre, Calabar, Cross River State	Police opened fire during APC party primaries in AKwa Ibom State	Was hit in the chest and died from the gunshot fired by Police	Police neither reacted to the incident nor revealed the identity of the cop	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
23/05/22	Toba Adedeji	Osogbo, Osun State	Police opened fire on people protesting killing of a youth by Police	Was hit and died from the gunshot fired by Police	Police claim ongoing investigation and that was where it stopped	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
04/06/22	Oliver Ezra Barawani	Kpanti Napo near Jalingo, Taraba State	Police officer opened fire on victim while driving along with Chairman of Lau LGA	Died from gunshot injury from a Police officer	Police neither reacted to the incident nor revealed the identity of the cop	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
11/07/22	Emeka Uwalaka	Nekede, Imo State	Was shot on his way back from church	Was hit and died from the gunshot fired by Police	Police kept mum on the incident	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
13/08/22	Godsent Obhafuso	Esan North East, Edo State	Police opened fire during burial of victim's master's late mother	Died from gunshot injury from a Police officer	No action known to have been taken by Nig. Police	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
06/09/22	Theophilus	Ilorin, Kwara	Arrest of three friends	Illegal arrest and	No action from	Aljazeera News

	Blamoh and friends	State	walking to buy food item	brutality by police	Police authorities	20/10/22
28/09/22	Kolesho Abayomi	Lekki Peninsula, Lagos State	Police fired at victim during motorcycle ban enforcement	Victim was hit by bullet and survived.	Nig. Police only paid hospital bill but did not reveal identity of cop.	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
07/12/22	Gafaru Buraimoh	Ajah, Lagos State	Police raided area where black market fuel is sold	Hit and killed by stray bullet while walking	No known action by Nig. Police	Punch Newspaper 31/12/22
25/12/22	Olabolanle Raheem	Ajah, Lagos State	Opened fire on victim at a Police checkpoint	Killing of pregnant woman by Nig. Police	Killer officer arrested and charged to court	Punch Newspaper 03/01/23
07/01/23	Jawaad Yusuf and another	Tudun Matawalle, Katsina State	Police invaded a wedding party and opened fire	Two teenagers shot and killed by Nig. Police	No action from Police authorities	Premium Times 07/01/23
07/02/23	Unidentified	Abeokuta, Ogun State	Protest against scarcity of Naira in the Sapon area of Abeokuta	Hit by a Police Bullet	No action from Police authorities	Premium Times 07/02/23
13/03/22	Eche Abraham, aka Soundboi.	Okene, Kogi State	Abduction and assault of an Abuja-based music artiste	Policemen (SWAT) demanded N100,000 to free him	CP had ordered an investigation into the incident.	Sahara Reporters 22/03/22
05/02/23	Nyommena Badapba	Tudun Wada, Plateau State	During a political argument	Shot in the shoulder	Policemen arrested and detained	Punch 06/03/23

Source: Authors compilation from quoted sources, 2023.

According to Olagbe (2022), in the first quarter of 2022, Nigerians filed 287 complaints against members of the Nigeria Police with such complaint ranging from professional misconduct to requesting money for bail. As a response, the Nigeria Police announced the sack of 31 of its personnel who were found to be guilty of offences ranging from extortion, robbery, brutality, extra-judicial killings, etc in October, 2022. Surprisingly, the police authorities announced that these offences were committed between April, 2021 and October, 2022. This emphasizes the belief that #EndSARS protests ended SARS but it did not end police violence and abuse. The disbandment of SARS was purely cosmetic and did not fundamentally reset the orientation and attitude of the Nigeria Police. 'I will kill you and nothing will happen' remains a favoured obscene refrain by police officers when dealing with terrified victims of their terror who try to caution them to be civil and responsible. Young men who trade in crypto currency, and have relevant crypto trading applications (like Binance, Trust Wallet, Blockchain, etc) installed on their handsets are arrested on trumped up charges of being fraudsters and extorted.

Furthermore, Nigerians are daily reading up on incidences where people are taken away during 'stop and search' activities by the Nigeria Police to unknown places where they are humiliated, threatened with death and disappearance and extorted of their funds. These policemen have compromised POS operators who assist them in effecting transfers from victim's accounts to pre-determined recipient accounts. Vehicles are taken to police stations and vandalized. Their tyres are deflated and the owners are forced to pay outrageous amounts to have the tires inflated and for 'security' of the arrested vehicle. Incidences of violence and abuse have continued to occur in an increasing frequency and have become like a norm for police officers. Tamuno, (1991:40) opines that from the dawn of history, a citizen's loyalty to his state or community is directly proportional to the degree to which the latter is able to protect him. Police violence and abuse in Nigeria continues to assume serious dimensions both in terms of number and frequency of occurrence and Nigerians are increasingly losing faith in their police and their country.

Origin of Nigeria Police as an Occupier Force

Although many reasons can be found to have turned the Nigeria Police into what it is today, the manner in which it was birthed in Nigeria continues to hold the most significant influence over it. This position is supported by Lawal and Ibrahim (2021:28) in their assertion that "historically, Nigerian Police grew from

the relics of the colonial police system, which was aimed at controlling the people and imposing the colonial authority and rule on the people. In essence, the Nigerian Police grew as an occupation force from the colonial time". On their part, OSI and NOPRIN (2010) aver that the current Nigerian Police, which was created in 1930 was a carryover from the colonial police in existence since 1820. Emphasizing this, Alemika (1997) contends that the:

History of the police forces in the country [Nigeria] indicates that the various forces were established, organized and maintained by colonial and post-colonial governments primarily for order maintenance that engenders repression, a culture of impunity, corruption, incivility, brutality, lack of transparency and accountability.

Alemika's position highlights that the colonial state exhibited a predatory character with the natives as its preys and established a police force which it used as a means of solely enforcing its will rather than for the protection the colonial subjects.

The colonial state was deemed to be above the law and had a monopoly of deadly arms and force which it applied at will to crush and criminalize all forms of dissent. Any form of resistance to the state's violence was immediately construed by the colonial government and its agents as illegitimate and deserving of immediate retribution (Falola, 2009) with the police as the enforcer. In the same vein, Osha (2020) argues that:

The police was never a force created to protect locals and foster harmonious community relations. Instead, it had been formed as an occupation force for a narrow and specific reason: to maintain the power of the state even if the state is illegitimate. Unfortunately, this operational outlook has hardly changed and certainly did not at the dawn of independence. So rather than viewing citizens as deserving of protection, the Nigeria Police Force views them primarily as adversaries, as established in the mandates of the colonial state. This lack of transformation in its outlook is almost extraordinary in its grotesqueness.

It is this operational outlook that was transferred to the newly independent Nigeria in 1960. The emergence of an independent Nigeria could not change the character of the police force and the several furors into military dictatorship only served to embolden this nefarious trait.

The above assertions were further emphasized by Mkhize and Madumi (2016) in their observation that an adequate analysis of the nature of the police in Nigeria which starts with the appreciation of the history and dynamics of its development is instructive to appreciate that the present repressive character of the Nigeria Police derives from its colonial history. The implication of this observation therefore is a reinforcement of the fact that the Nigeria Police emanated from the embers of a socio-political and economic environment which did not place the interest, safety and wellbeing of Nigerian people above all interests. It was birthed as an occupier force to promote and perpetrate the interest of the colonialists. After independence, the only changes in the structure and operational outlook of the Nigeria Police were largely superficial. It is such colonial mentality that drives the impunity with which police officers operate in Nigeria. So, rather than viewing citizens as deserving of protection, the Nigeria Police Force views them primarily as adversaries, as established in the mandates of the colonial state. This lack of transformation in its outlook is almost extraordinary in its grotesqueness.

With regards to the character of the Nigeria Police, Lawal and Ibrahim (2021:28) opine that "the emergence of civil rule in 1999 could have changed so many things. Unfortunately, political interests and worsening state of the economy and the politics meant that the police could not be properly reformed". Rather than being reformed, the Nigerian Police became a tool of wanton repression and exploitation of the citizens by the political cum economic class. The Nigeria Police continued to indiscriminately mete out unchecked violence and abuse upon Nigerian citizens. Its coercive powers in terms of monopoly of

deadly arms and force were perverted by the powerful political elite and used to reinforce the existing inequality and oppression against the citizens in Nigeria. Hence, several rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Nigerian constitution such as freedom of assembly, freedom from torture, right to life, privacy, fair trial, etc continue to be subjected to abuse by the police.

In Adelokun's (2020) view, although the police are aware of the procedural laws of arrest and interrogation, they do not always comply with these laws in their actions. Where an attempt is made by the police to apply such laws, they are applied hastily in such a way that the victims become harassed and victimized. Indeed, it can be said that it is strictly the underlying impunity that drives the operation of the Nigeria Police. Citizens continue to find themselves in that situation in which they feel much deprived of a sense of belonging and dignity. The several jaundiced attempts to reverse this obnoxious trend and introduce a culture of mutual trust and support in the police have ended in futility as the fundamentals underlining the estrangement continue to subsist and influence the nature of the relationship between the Nigeria Police and Nigerians. Hence, the Nigeria Police have continued to serve the new set of political and economic leaders in ensuring that obstacles to the security of their selves, their interests and their investments were kept at bay.

Discussion

It can safely be concluded that Police brutality remains on the front burner in national discourse as one of the most pressing problems in Nigeria (Ole and Temitope 2022:1) because the political cum economic elite continue to retain their exploitation of the Nigerian Police to perpetrate acts of oppression against citizens. Two years after the #EndSARS protests, police violence and abuse still loom large in Nigeria. Immediately after, and unnerved by, the #EndSARS protests, the government had promised far reaching reforms in the police but as at date, little concrete action is seen to have been taken to reassure Nigerians who bear the brunt of police oppression. Members of the SWAT unit that replaced SARS are still in active service and patrolling the streets as plainclothes policemen extorting, arresting and torturing Nigerians. The government has not been seen to actualize the promised reforms. SARS officers were not held to account for their violent and abusive behaviour just as officers of SWAT are getting away with continued perpetration of violence, abuses, brutality and extortion. At this point in the country's existence, citizens are afraid each time they step out of their homes. Amidst this situation, the government comes across as unsure of how to re-orientate police officers, punish the erring ones and tackle the corruption suffocating the police. The promised police reforms have not been significantly pursued by the government and public confidence in the police is at its lowest ebb. Whatever shreds of existing confidence to be found is being replaced by distrust and citizens now tend to run from the police rather than run to them.

The police are expected to be guardians of social order. As such, it is surprising that it is the same police officers who maltreat citizens with gusto. Yet, the same police officers fail abysmally to contain rising violence, banditry, abductions, assassinations, assaults, etc by armed persons and gangs. This suggests purposive poor application (or absence) of internal and external accountability mechanisms by the supervising authorities usually composed of the political cum economic elite. This situation continues to exacerbate impunity in the Nigeria Police and has continued to encourage violent and abusive policing. Ojo (2011) asserts that as an institution, the police force, helps to preserve, fortify and reproduce the prevailing social order, and are hardly catalyst for its change. Thus when a social order is oppressive, exploitative and unjust, the police preserve it by suppressing and defusing demand for democracy and elimination of oppression and injustices. Therefore, the Nigeria Police which came into existence as the tool of the political elite to retain a favourable social order continues to exist as such.

From the above, it can be perceived that police violence and abuse could be attributed to the laws imported by the colonizing political class which were not intrinsically tailored for public order or social stability. Instead, their over-riding goal was to suppress all forms of dissent and opposition to their exploitation. This repressive model of policing was adopted at independence by those who inherited power from the departing colonialists. Little effort was made to alter the repressive nature of the police with regards to its basic approach and relationship to Nigerian citizens, particularly those at the base of the societal rung. It is not surprising therefore, that police violence and abuse continues to exist in police practice in the country despite several protests in the past for police reforms. This appears to be the prime reason why the government, despite several promises and assurances, is reluctant to address the issues of police deviance in Nigeria.

Therefore, two years after the #EndSARS protests, the political cum economic elite in Nigeria continue to retain their exploitation of the Nigerian Police to perpetrate their acts of oppression against citizens. This is being increasingly witnessed even as Nigerians went to the polls to vote in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Within this period, there have been witnessed ubiquitous reports of cases of political thugs carrying out attacks of intimidation on innocent masses while attending rallies or voting in the presence of police officers who choose to look the other way. In some instances, these men in uniform, especially members of the Nigerian Police, were caught directly involved in perpetuating electoral malpractices in the bid to ensure their favoured political elite's hold on political power is further perpetuated. Where such reports were officially brought to the police, the reaction from the Nigeria Police, especially when there are 'orders from above' has either been inaction or convoluted delays which ended up denying justice or restitution to the victims. It is therefore easy for the citizens to accept that "the police are used to carry out dirty works of intimidation of innocent masses by torturing, bullying, and harassing them into submission especially during election times (Ulo, 2021:188). Intrinsically, the Nigeria police have become the very instrument used to subdue Nigerians into submission to the whims and caprices of the government when the masses try to challenge [the government or] any of government's policies (Wolfe and Piquero, 2011).

Conclusion

Although poor budget allocation and insufficient salaries contribute to aggravate the tendency to extort from the citizens by the police, it does not obfuscate the fact that the Nigeria Police is deeply rooted as the product of a history which held little or no regard for its citizens. This history is mired in corruption, mediocrity, nepotism, unaccountability, and lack of stewardship. Therefore, the feelings of disenchantment being experienced by Nigerians at present is similar to what was obtained during colonial rule because the ongoing violence and abuse by the Nigeria Police can be compared to the treatment the colonial authorities meted out to their colony by depriving them of their dignity and a sense of belonging in the land of their birth. Nigeria continues to post huge numbers as a country that allows state security agents to violently abuse people with impunity against all democratic tenets. Nigerians major recourse has been to take to social media to share their stories of violent and abusive encounters with the police, bad governance and insensitive leadership. They are at this period frightened and at the same time incensed, considering that it is the same police that is entrusted with the maintenance of law and order and therefore the guardians of the rules and norms that the society agreed to live by (Transparency International, 2012).

Police brutality is evil and inhumane. It is equally a grave violation of fundamental human rights. The incessant acts of violence and abuses against innocent Nigerians continue to portray the Nigeria Police as irresponsible. Adelakun (2020) aptly observed that as citizens continue to be subjected to police brutality and are not granted the justice they deserve and desire, their pain and anger toward the police and the government is continuously aggravated and the conditions for future disobedience and chaos

gradually takes root. Worsening economic conditions and bleak projections for the future continue to fan the flames as the Nigerian citizenry, reeling from the weight of violence and abuse, pensively await another spark that will ignite its fury against its oppressors. It is very noteworthy therefore, to state that the #EndSARS was not the first time Nigerians have risen up against police violence and abuse, in Nigeria. It may not be the last if adequate measures are not put in place to prevent a reoccurrence.

Recommendations

It must first be emphasized that no reform of the Nigeria Police will be successful and effective if the widening inequality in the Nigerian society continues to deepen. This inequality created an acrimonious relationship between the colonizing political class and the Nigerian populace which subsists till date. At the same time, the Nigeria police, in its present state, continue to employ violence, duplicity, impunity and suppression to maintain the relationship of exploitation between the social classes in the society. Reducing the inequality gap will create the requisite environment that will enable the transformation of the Nigeria Police to an institution that is able to protect citizens and engender harmonious relationship between the classes in the society.

In addition, the hierarchy of the Nigeria Police must make clear both the rules of conduct and the consequences for violation of the rules, whether the misconduct is by actual behaviour, by ignoring the improper conduct of other officers or by failing to supervise. This is very important considering the fact that the actions of personnel of the Nigeria Police have humongous impact on the lives, liberties, rights, safety, and dignity of Nigerian citizens. The government must show that police men and women are held closely accountable for their policies and actions. Until this is done, and until Nigerians perceive that the operational outlook of the Nigeria Police has changed, they will continue to view the police as oppressors who pervert the principles of justice while failing to promote peace and protect lives and properties.

The government must find a way to criminalize the act of torture and other misconduct. Police officers who are found to have been involved in misconduct should be held accountable and be punished for their actions as a way to totally bring a stop to any form of ill treatment by the police and ensure the total safety of citizens. Also, there should be a clear cut stated sanction for non-conforming officers. The Police Act 2020 primarily seeks to address this by curtailing police violence and abuse. It aims to primarily uphold citizens rights by holding police officers accountable for protecting the rights of the people and accord suspects human treatment with regards to their rights to dignity of persons and not to be subjected to any form of torture or other ill treatment in line with many regional and international conventions prohibiting torture to which Nigeria is a signatory. With the spirit of optimism, the Police Act 2020 embodies sleeping potentials that can only be awakened through the strict and conscious implementation of its provisions. Only then can this Act achieve its purpose and fulfill the principles of justice to promote peace and protect lives and properties (Adeshina, 2020).

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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