

# The Nigerian Political System: Youth Political Participation and The End SARS Protests

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the Nigerian political system with a specific focus on youth political participation and the impact of the End SARS protests. Drawing upon the political culture theory and utilising a quantitative methodology, the study examines the relationship between the End SARS protests and the enhancement of youth political engagement in Nigeria. The research findings revealed that the End SARS protests have played a significant role in fostering increased youth participation in the political landscape of Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of survey data and statistical models, the study demonstrates a positive correlation between the protest and heightened political activism among young Nigerians. The research uses 400 participants. The research found that the End SARS protest significantly increased youth political participation in Nigeria, with 76.8% actively joining the protests and over 50% engaging more in elections and governance post-protest. A moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.593$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) confirmed this link. The findings of this research have important implications for policymakers, political actors, and civil society organisations in Nigeria. This study contributes to the understanding of the Nigerian political system by highlighting the transformative role of the End SARS protests in enhancing youth political participation. The study concludes with recommendations for further research and policy initiatives aimed at sustaining and expanding youth political engagement in Nigeria's democratic processes.

**Keywords:** End SARS Protest, Political Culture Theory, Political Participation, Youths

## INTRODUCTION

The incursion of youths into the political system of their country is a necessary precondition for the survival of such a system. Universally, the youth represent the majority in the world, with half of the world under the age of 30 (Akinyetun, 2021). The engagement of youth in politics has borne fruit over the years across the world; the current president of France, Emmanuel Macron, was 39 years old when he won the presidential elections. Sebastian Kurz became the Chancellor of Austria at the age of 31 and served for two terms.

In the Nigerian context, youth participation in politics has been less profound. This is due to certain contextual factors like being disinterested in politics because it does not represent the problems that are important to them or the lack of financial capacity to contest an election (Akinyetun, 2021). These are a few of the issues that encumber the prospects of Nigerian youth in participating in their own politics. Albeit these structural limitations necessitated their participation in politics in an unorthodox way.

The history of protests in Nigeria is as old as the country itself. The colonial administration was riddled with countless protests against unpopular colonial policies. The Aba Women's Riot of 1929 had the involvement of women from Igbo, Ibibio, Ogoni and so on (Obienusi 1981). This was motivated by the colonial obnoxious policy of taxing women. There were various protests led by Michael Imodu, the head of the civil service, to clamour for better working conditions for Nigerian civil servants and the working classes.

The post-colonial era in Nigeria had its own fair share of protests. During her infancy stage, the administration of Tafawa Balewa entered the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, which would enable the British to build a military command high post in Nigeria. This generated a lot of reactions among Nigerians who viewed it as a form of

neo-colonialism. Idang (1970) noted that the public mounted a serious opposition to the Pact, and this opposition include both individuals and groups in the country like the university students' organisation. A protest was staged across the country, which forced the administration to renounce the Treaty. Similarly, in 1978, there was the 'Ali Must Go' staged by the Nigerian Students against the infamous policy that increased meal ticket from 50 kobo to 2 naira (Adebowale, 2020).

In the Nigerian Fourth Republic from 1999, there has been a series of protests over government policies or actions. The most notable one was the 'Occupy Nigeria' protest in January 2012. It was an enormous protest against the unpopular decision of former President Goodluck Jonathan administration to remove fuel subsidy. Egbunike (2015) defined the protest as a deliberate and collective effort by Nigerians to reject the sudden increase of Petrol from N65 to N140. The protest compelled the government to reduce the Petroleum price from N140 to N97.

The End SARS protests occurred in the last quarter of 2020, precisely from October 8 to October 2020 (Lagos State Judicial Panel 2021). The protest was against the excesses and extra-judicial conduct of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the police saddled with the responsibility of ensuring there is an end to armed robbery in the country. However, this police outfit became arbitrary and committed human rights violations, especially against the youth. There were countless allegations of harassment against the unit by the youth in the country. The protest started in the first week of October 2020 after report filter surfaced that police has shot a boy in Delta State, and ended on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the same month (Uwazuruike, 2020).

Major cities in Nigeria like Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Port-Harcourt, Abuja, Enugu host the protest, while Lagos was the epicentre of the protest. The protest later culminated in the disbandment of SARS and the commissioning of a judicial panel to investigate allegations against the police unit. However, the tragic end to the protest in October 20, 2020, when the military went to Lekki Toll Gate to forcefully disband the protesters. This event was a bloody one as lives were reportedly lost and many people were injured (Lagos State Judicial Panel, 2021).

The Post-End SARS period became important to this study in a bid to establish if the passive and active experiences of the Youth, particularly in Lagos during and after the protest, have influenced them to be more involved in Nigerian politics or to stay away from it. This would be the focus of this research project.

The EndSARS protest occurred to curtail the arbitrariness of police brutality in Nigeria. This was necessitated by the inadequacies of the structures that are supposed to provide redress. Hence, the people, particularly the youth, needed to take their frustration outside of the governmental structures. The End SARS protest presented an avenue for youth political participation because at the root of the protest and demands were political issues.

Consequently, Lagos State government set up a Judicial Committee of Enquiry to investigate the October 20, 2020, Lekki Toll Gate. The committee concluded their enquiry in July 2021. They ascertained that the military was invited and that lives were lost, too. The federal government, through the Minister for Information and Culture, Lai Muhammed, condemned the findings of the enquiry. The Lagos State government also issued a white paper that undermines the Judicial Panel's findings. These events are discouraging to many youths who feel the findings of the judicial panel were accurate.

Thus, the tragic end to the protest raised concern whether the experience of youths during the protest could serve as a discouraging factor that would make them stay away from politics, or the fact that their demands were accepted by the government would be a stimulant to further increase their participation in the country's polity. This is the special focus of this study to shed light on whether the End SARS protest will encourage them to be more involved in the Nigerian political system or not.

Consequently, this study aims to assess the level of youth political participation in Nigeria through the End SARS protest and how it impacts their involvement in the 2023 general election. The research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

Does End SARS protest amount to youth political participation?

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Will post-End SARS youth political participation increase in the Nigerian political process?

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between End SARS protest and Youth Political participation.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** ENDSARS protest does not increase Youth Political Participation in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### End SARS Protest

According to Amnesty International (2020), the End SARS protest was a series of mass demonstrations and civil unrest that happened in Nigeria between October and November 2020. The protests were sparked by outrage over police brutality and corruption, specifically targeting SARS, a unit of the country's Police Force that was created in 1992 to reduce armed robbery and gun violence in Nigeria, but famous for its abuse of power and human rights violations (Ajisafe et al., 2021; Iwuoha & Anichie, 2022). The protest movement quickly gained widespread support from cross-section of people coming together to put an end to the unwholesome actions of police and by extension, the reform of the criminal justice system (Ojedokun et al., 2021).

The protests attracted the attention of international media and human rights organisations as it was perceived to be an expression of unity against institutional injustice. The protest commenced primarily against the arbitrariness of SARS which have a long history of using excessive force and carrying out extrajudicial killings, with victims often targeted because of their perceived wealth or social status (Amnesty International, 2020). Another key issue was corruption within the police force, which was a significant factor that result in police brutality (Ochi & Mark, 2021). Many protesters noted that endemic corruption allowed abusive officers to escape punishment and continue their abusive behaviour with impunity (Iwuoha & Anichie, 2022).

According to Ortiz et al. (2013), social protest and demonstration are often conducted to demand for more positive output by government which includes more government funding of social services, n and reduction in corruption. The End SARS protest has been attributed to several causes by different authors, but the most prevalent causes are highlighted by Uwazuruike (2020) as follows: right to life, liberty, privacy and family life, and freedom from torture.

### Timeline of Events that led to the End SARS Protests

The timeline of major events that shaped the End SARS movement started from 2017, according to Amnesty International (2020). According to Uwazuruike (2020) noted that on December 4, 2017, Ibrahim Idris, the then Nigerian IGP ordered the immediate reorganisation of SARS due to public outcry, as well as an investigation into allegations of abuses by SARS officers. This particular order was not observed, and it later led to the December 11, 2017, rally call by activists that SARS should be scrapped. This rally call was held in Lagos, but with a poor turnout. Thus, nothing impactful was achieved.

A year later, on September 5, 2018, the IGP again banned SARS operatives from conducting stop and search operations on roads (Amnesty International, 2020). This made it the second time a government authority has banned the police outfit from public patrol. Similarly, on January 21, 2019, the new IGP, Mohammed Adamu, ordered the immediate disbandment of the SARS, Special Investigation Panel and Special Tactical Squad (Odili & Egobuze, 2021). This particular order was not observed as well. Hence, making it the third time the government has attempted to ban SARS but could not effectively achieve it. This created a trend of police hierarchy do not active control on some of their outfit, especially SARS.

The End SARS protests started effectively on October 3, 2020, on social media after a member of the police outfit was reported to have pushed a young man out of his vehicle and carted away his vehicle in Ughelli, Delta State (Amnesty International, 2020). Orabueze et al. (2021) noted that thousands of demonstrators trooped out into major capital cities in Nigeria to register their frustration with the authorities. The protest gained global empathy with international and political leaders like United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, former United States Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, U.S.

president elect Joe Biden, boxing heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua, Arsenal footballer Mesut Ozil, and American rapper Kanye West were among the top figures tweeting in support of the protest (Ajisafe et al, 2021). For several weeks in October, the hashtag #EndSARS was the number one trending topic on global Twitter, with former CEO of Twitter, Jack Dorsey launching a special emoji for the movement.

Consequently, on October 8, 2020, Nigerian celebrities joined the protests showing their support. Nigerian artistes such as Tiwa Savage, Runtown, Mr Macaroni, Rinu, Falz, Wurld, and DJ Spinal were amongst the first set of celebrities to join the protest. Three days later, on October 11, the first major gathering at the Lekki toll gate was witnessed. The toll gate would later become the epicentre of the protest, according to Husted (2020). States like Rivers, Enugu, Oyo, Osun, Edo, Kogi, Ebonyi, Anambra and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, became crowded with demonstrators.

The protesters later presented five demands to the government which include the unconditional release of all arrested protesters, justice for victims of police brutality in the country, psychological SARS officers, and improved remuneration for police officers. Unfortunately, on October 20, 2020, the protest ended with a government crackdown on demonstrators at the Lekki toll gate after earlier announcing the imposition of a curfew by the Lagos State government. This was immediately followed by riots in Lagos with wanton vandalisation of public structures and properties. Shops were also looted. Uwazuruike (2020) noted that "the violence and looting soon spread to other parts of the country, causing several states to declare curfews"

### **Youth Political Participation**

The concept of youth political participation requires careful analysis of the two words that make up the concept "Youth" and "Political Participation". Youth refers to the persons transitioning from childhood to adulthood with a certain degree of independence (United Nations, 2013). There exists a consensus about the social capability of what constitutes a youth, but there is a large disagreement on the age. The World Bank claimed youths are persons between the ages of 12 to 24, while the United Nations expanded on the starting age to be 15 to 24 years as which constitutes the youth.

However, the definition of the two major bodies is applicable in the West and not for developing regions like Africa (Galstyan, 2019; Hilker & Fraser, 2009). Their argument extends that Africa has different socio-economic realities, and the age bracket will be too narrow for the concept of youth to be perfectly applied. Consequently, in their definition of the age bracket that constitutes youths, they agreed with Nigeria's National Youth Policy (2009) that the age range 18-35 is what constitutes youths in Africa. Hence, this research will adopt the age 18-35 as what constitutes youths.

Van Deth (2014) noted that political participation includes all forms of voluntary activities by individuals or groups in their natural or socio-cultural capability that concern the government, state, and politics. It then became evident that political participation refers to all forms of activities by citizens of a country that affect the polity. In an attempt to create a more inclusive definition, Sairambay (2020, p. 124) puts political participation as "any action by citizens that is intended to influence the outcomes of political institutions or their structures, and is fostered by civic engagement". This definition considers contemporary actions, like online activities by individuals, to be included as part of political participation. According to Teorell et al. (2007), there are five main types of political participation: electoral participation, party activities, and protest activities like strikes and demonstrations. Others are contact activities such as reaching out to public officials, and consumer participation which includes signing petitions, and donating money.

Youth political participation refers to the involvement of young people in political activity like governance, elections, civic duties, and policy making (Sida, 2010). Weiss (2020) noted that youth political participation involves both traditional and modern forms of political participation. The traditional or conventional forms of political participation include activities geared towards joining a political party and active participation in the electoral process. The modern forms include the various online or digital actions that directly or indirectly influence political outcomes.



In the context of Nigeria, youth political participation involves making a conscious effort to influence the political apparatus in the country through active political engagement like protest, petition, trending topic online, demonstration, joining political parties, and forming civil society or pressure groups (Vite et al., 2020).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POLITICAL CULTURE THEORY

The political culture was espoused by the writings of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963/1965) 'The Civic Culture. The authors attempt to explain political participation in the selected countries, and discovered the existence of differing political cultures. These political cultures determine the level or degree of citizens' involvement in the political system (Denk et al., 2015).

The Civic culture is the mixture of the three political cultures in a political system. The civic culture reveals the attitudinal orientation of the citizens towards the political process in a country (Denk et al., 2015). Political culture refers to the "particular distribution of patterns of orientation towards political objects among the members of the nation" (Almond & Verba, 1963/65, p. 13). This definition posits that political culture has tangible and intangible elements to it. This includes feelings, opinions, actions and inactions of the citizens toward the political objects in a country.

In their work, Almond and Verba (1963/65) developed three categories of political culture in every political system. These political cultures are

**Participant culture:** The participant political culture is posited in individuals who have a positive orientation towards a political system and play active roles within the system (Denk et al., 2015). These categories of people are interested and actively participate in the political system.

**Subject Culture:** This kind of political culture is found among individuals who have a positive orientation towards the political system but have passivity towards taking action (Denk et al., 2015). These are the set of people who are interested in the political systems, they are informed on political issues, but will not take any action to influence the political outcome.

**Parochial Culture:** This form of political culture is beheld by individuals who are indifferent towards the political system and are politically passive at the same time (Denk et al., 2015). They are referred to as sleepwalkers by Almond and Verba (1963) to show the level of political docility in them. They are neither interested nor prepared to engage the political system.

Developing on Almond and Verba's typologies, Sairambay (2021) added a "contestation" political culture. The contestation of political culture refers to every form of challenge to the political order (Sairambay, 2021). The author furthered that contestation is evident and relevant in a political system that lacks an effective form of political participation. Thus, examples of contestation of political culture include riots, demonstrations, and protest movements (Sairambay, 2021). The 'contestants' (the people with contestation political culture) are "those citizens who are aware of politics and attempt to challenge the political order" (Sairambay, 2021, p. 116).

Conclusively, the political culture theory explains the level of individual political participation as a function of their political culture. The case of End SARS fits perfectly with the participant and contestation political culture.

## METHODOLOGY

The survey research design will be used in carrying out this research. According to Cresswell and Cresswell (2018), the survey method is a research strategy capable of revealing and describing the characteristics of a population through its samples, such as the trends, attitudes, and opinions. They asserted that the survey method could help to describe the population, i.e., determine the frequency of occurrence of an event. The survey method is useful to inspect the relationship between variables, as, in this research, the relationship between digital marketing and consumer buying behaviour is the focus. Lastly, Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) claimed that survey research has predictive power.

The population of this study comprises all youths in Nigeria. There are about 151 million youth in Nigeria (Worldometer, 2023). The simple random sampling is adopted for this study. The sample size for this study will be 400, and it was determined through Taro Yamane's sample size formula [ $n = N/(1+Ne^2)$ ].

$n$  = sample size,  $N$  = population size of 151m, 1 is a constant value, and  $e$  is the margin of error assumed to be 0.05.

$$n = 151000000 / (1 + 151000000(0.05^2))$$

$$n = 400$$

The data collection instrument to be used is the structured questionnaire. Kothari (2004) asserted that questionnaires could be considered the 'heart' of survey research. The questionnaire is a self-completed format and will be administered online to the respondents. The questionnaire will be divided into two sections, The first section will seek the demographic details of the respondents, while the second part comprises items- questions to be answered in Likert scale format, which will be used to measure pertinent constructs (both the independent and dependent variables of the study). Each item of the construct is presented with five (5) alternative responses from strongly agree to strongly disagree with numerical value 1-5. The questionnaire survey follows all the required ethical considerations. It is carried out with a zero-tolerance degree of validity will be obtained with the help of the supervisor's input, who will act as the reviewer of this study.

The research instrument was also tested for its reliability, which refers to the extent to which the instrument will provide similar results when used repeatedly (Creswell, 2017). The questionnaire was tested for its reliability with the use of the internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) method. Cronbach's alpha was used with a coefficient of 0.719. According to Frankael and Warren (2000), an Alpha value of 0.5 and above is considered suitable to make group references that are accurate enough.

The data collected and inputted into SPSS version 26, simple percentage for respondents' biodata and arithmetic mean for the research questions, and Pearson correlation will be utilised to test and interpret the stated hypotheses. The descriptive and inferential data will be presented with the aid of a table and chart.

## FINDINGS

|                          | Category     | Frequency  | Percentage    |
|--------------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| <b>Gender</b>            | Male         | 183        | 45.8%         |
|                          | Female       | 217        | 54.3%         |
|                          | Total        | 400        | 100%          |
| <b>Age</b>               | 18 - 27      | 221        | 55.3%         |
|                          | 28 - 37      | 160        | 40.0%         |
|                          | 38 - 47      | 19         | 4.8%          |
|                          | 58 and above | 0          | 0.0%          |
|                          | <b>Total</b> | <b>400</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |
| <b>Educational level</b> | SSCE         | 121        | 30.3%         |
|                          | ND/NCE       | 142        | 35.5%         |

|                   |               |            |               |
|-------------------|---------------|------------|---------------|
| <b>Occupation</b> | BSC/HND       | 120        | 30.0%         |
|                   | MSC/MBA       | 17         | 4.3%          |
|                   | Others        | 0          | 0.0%          |
|                   | <b>Total</b>  | <b>400</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |
|                   | Student       | 223        | 55.8%         |
|                   | Civil Servant | 139        | 34.8%         |
|                   | Trader        | 10         | 2.5%          |
|                   | Unemployed    | 10         | 2.5%          |
|                   | Others        | 18         | 4.5%          |
|                   | <b>Total</b>  | <b>400</b> | <b>100.0%</b> |
|                   |               |            |               |
|                   |               |            |               |

Table 1: The demography of the respondents.

The provided demographic table offers valuable insights into the composition of a sample population across various demographic categories, namely, gender, age range, educational level, and occupation.

### Research Question One: Does End SARS protest amount to youth political participation?

|   |       | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total  |
|---|-------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|--------|
| I participated in the End SARS protest of 2020  | Count | 5                 | 10       | 6       | 73    | 307            | 400    |
|   | %     | 1.3%              | 2.5%     | 1.3%    | 18.3% | 76.8%          | 100.0% |
| The End SARS protests were a result of police brutality                                   | Count | 4                 | 6        | 10      | 105   | 275            | 400    |
|   | %     | 1.2%              | 1.4%     | 2.5%    | 28.3% | 68.8%          | 100.0% |
| The End SARS protests can be blamed on bad governance                                     | Count | 10                | 6        | 40      | 40    | 288            | 400    |
|   | %     | 5.0%              | 1.4%     | 14.0%   | 14.0% | 72.0%          | 100.0% |
| The End SARS protests are an avenue for the youth to participate in the political system. | Count | 0                 | 20       | 18      | 143   | 219            | 400    |
|   | %     | 0.0%              | 5.0%     | 4.5%    | 35.8% | 54.8%          | 100.0% |
| The End SARS protests increased my interest in the Nigerian political system.             | Count | 10                | 0        | 20      | 120   | 280            | 400    |
|   | %     | 2.5%              | 0.0%     | 5.0%    | 27.5% | 65.0%          | 100.0% |
| The End SARS protests made me feel involved in the Nigerian political system.             | Count | 10                | 10       | 0       | 147   | 233            | 400    |
|   | %     | 2.5%              | 2.5%     | 0.0%    | 38.8% | 58.3%          | 100.0% |

Table 2: Participants' responses to the first research question

## Research Question Two: Will Post-End SARS youth political participation increase in the Nigerian political process?

|  |       | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Total  |
|--|-------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|--------|
| Due to the End SARS protests, I became more involved in the 2023 general election.                 | Count | 0                 | 20       | 0       | 139   | 241            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 5.0%     | 0.0%    | 34.8% | 60.2%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I now pay more attention to government policies and implementations. | Count | 0                 | 18       | 20      | 176   | 186            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 4.5%     | 5.0%    | 44.0% | 46.5%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I joined a civil society organisation                                | Count | 0                 | 20       | 38      | 196   | 146            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 5.0%     | 9.5%    | 49.0% | 36.5%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I registered and collected my Permanent Voters Card.                 | Count | 0                 | 0        | 40      | 131   | 229            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 0.0%     | 10.0%   | 32.8% | 57.3%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I voted in the 2023 general election                                 | Count | 0                 | 40       | 0       | 142   | 218            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 10.0%    | 0.0%    | 35.5% | 54.5%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I voted for candidates in the 2023 general election.                 | Count | 0                 | 20       | 20      | 131   | 229            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 5.0%     | 5.0%    | 32.8% | 57.3%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I campaigned for candidates in the 2023 general election.            | Count | 0                 | 20       | 0       | 179   | 201            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 5.0%     | 0.0%    | 44.8% | 50.2%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I monitored the election counting and announcement.                  | Count | 0                 | 0        | 20      | 146   | 234            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 0.0%     | 5.0%    | 36.5% | 58.5%          | 100.0% |
| Due to the End SARS protests, I monitored the post-election events                                 | Count | 0                 | 40       | 19      | 158   | 183            | 400    |
|  | %     | 0.0%              | 10.0%    | 4.8%    | 39.5% | 45.8%          | 100.0% |
| I think the 2023 general election results were influenced by the End SARS protests.                | Count | 19                | 20       | 20      | 113   | 228            | 400    |
|  | %     | 4.8%              | 5.0%     | 5.0%    | 28.3% | 57.0%          | 100.0% |

Table 3: Participants' responses to the second research question

## Hypothesis One

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between End SARS protest and Youth Political participation.

| Correlations |                  |                               |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
|              | End SARS Protest | Youth Political Participation |



|                               |                     |        |        |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------|
| End SARS Protest              | Pearson Correlation | 1      | .593** |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        | .000   |
|                               | N                   | 400    | 400    |
| Youth Political Participation | Pearson Correlation | .593** | 1      |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000   |        |
|                               | N                   | 400    | 400    |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In analysing the relationship between End SARS protests and youth political participation, this study utilises the Pearson correlation test. The correlation test result examines the relationship between the variables “End SARS Protest” and “Youth Political Participation.” The correlation coefficient between these variables is found to be ( $r = 0.593$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating a moderate positive correlation. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to 1, where values closer to -1 or 1 represent a stronger correlation, while values close to 0 indicate a weaker correlation. In this case, the correlation coefficient of 0.593 suggests a meaningful and significant relationship between the two variables. The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient is reported as 0.001, which is less than the conventional threshold of 0.05. This indicates that the correlation between the End SARS Protest and Youth Political participation is statistically significant. With the information above, this implies that the null hypothesis “there is no significant relationship between End SARS protest and Youth Political participation.” Will be rejected, and the alternate hypothesis “there is a significant relationship between End SARS protest and Youth Political participation” will be accepted.

## Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>0</sub>:** End SARS protest does not increase Youth Political Participation in Nigeria.

| Correlations                  |                     |                  |                               |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
|                               |                     | End SARS Protest | Youth Political Participation |
| End SARS Protest              | Pearson Correlation | 1                | .593**                        |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                  | .000                          |
|                               | N                   | 400              | 400                           |
| Youth Political Participation | Pearson Correlation | .593**           | 1                             |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000             |                               |
|                               | N                   | 400              | 400                           |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the provided correlation analysis above, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the "End SARS Protest" and "Youth Political Participation" variables is 0.593. The p-value associated with this correlation coefficient is less than 0.01, indicating a significant correlation between the variables. Since the correlation coefficient is positive (0.593) and statistically significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), we can reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) that

states "End SARS protest does not increase Youth Political Participation in Nigeria." Instead, we have evidence to support the alternative hypothesis (H1) that states "End SARS protest increases Youth Political Participation in Nigeria." In conclusion, based on the correlation analysis, there is a statistically significant positive correlation between the End SARS protest and Youth Political Participation in Nigeria, suggesting that the protest has an impact on increasing the political participation of the youth in the country.

## DISCUSSION

The data overwhelmingly supports the argument that the End SARS protests constituted a significant form of youth political participation. A striking 76.8% of respondents strongly agreed that they participated in the protests, reinforcing the notion that Nigerian youths actively engaged in collective action against police brutality and bad governance. This aligns with Verba and Nie's (1972) definition of political participation as actions aimed at influencing political outcomes, as well as Sairambay's (2020) inclusion of protest movements as a legitimate form of political engagement.

Furthermore, 68.8% of respondents strongly agreed that the protests were a direct response to police brutality, while 72% attributed them to broader systemic failures in governance. This suggests that the protests were not merely a reaction to SARS' excesses but also a critique of Nigeria's political structure. The findings resonate with Ortiz et al. (2013), who argue that protests often emerge from frustrations with institutional inefficiencies and serve as a mechanism for demanding systemic reforms.

The 54.8% who strongly agreed that the protests were an avenue for political participation, coupled with 65% reporting increased interest in Nigeria's political system, indicate that the demonstrations served as a catalyst for political consciousness. This supports Almond and Verba's (1963/65) participant political culture, where individuals actively engage in political processes. However, the violent crackdown on protesters at Lekki Toll Gate raises questions about whether this engagement will translate into sustained political involvement or disillusionment.

The second research question explored whether the protests led to increased political participation in the 2023 general election. The data reveals a substantial shift in youth engagement:

95% reported increased involvement in the 2023 general elections.

90.1% registered and collected their Permanent Voters Cards (PVCs).

90% voted in the elections.

95% campaigned for candidates.

94.9% and 85.3% monitored election results and post-election events, respectively.

These findings suggest that the End SARS protests had a lasting impact on youth political behaviour, transitioning from street protests to formal electoral participation. This shift aligns with Weiss's (2020) distinction between traditional (voting, campaigning) and modern (protests, digital activism) forms of political participation. The protests may have served as a political awakening, motivating youths to channel their frustrations into electoral participation.

However, the 57% who strongly agreed that the 2023 election results were influenced by the protests indicate a perception that the movement had tangible political consequences. Yet, given Nigeria's history of electoral irregularities, further research is needed to assess whether this perceived influence translated into substantive policy changes or merely symbolic victories.

The study's findings align with Almond & Verba's (1963/65) political culture theory, particularly the participant and contestation political cultures. The high levels of protest participation and subsequent electoral engagement suggest that Nigerian youths exhibit a participant culture actively seeking to influence

governance. However, the violent suppression of the protests also reinforces Sairambay's (2021) contestation culture, where marginalised groups challenge political authority outside formal structures.

The data raises an important question: Does the Nigerian political system encourage sustained participant culture, or does it force youths into contestation due to institutional barriers? The fact that 85.5% joined civil society organisations post-End SARS suggests a shift toward structured participation, but the government's dismissal of the judicial panel's findings may reinforce distrust in formal institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The research underscores the importance of acknowledging and fostering youth political participation in Nigeria. The End SARS protests in 2020 served as a turning point, inspiring young people to actively engage in the political system and advocate for change. By harnessing this momentum, policymakers can work towards a more vibrant and representative political system that addresses the aspirations and needs of the entire population, particularly the youth.

In conclusion, the research on "The Nigerian Political System: The Youth Political Participation and The ENDSARS Protests" provides compelling evidence that the ENDSARS protests in 2020 had a profound impact on augmenting youth political participation in Nigeria. The study, which employed the political culture theory and a quantitative methodology, shed light on the transformative effects of the protests on the engagement of young people in the country's political processes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has shown the deficit in the engagement between public officials and youths in Nigeria. Hence, it is recommended that policymakers and stakeholders should recognise and encourage the continued engagement of young people in the political process. There should also be more emphasis on civic education in schools and communities to enhance political awareness among young people. Similarly, there should be a provision of financial and logistical support to youth-led initiatives that aim to address societal issues and advocate for change. The provision of access to reliable and accurate information related to politics and governance cannot be over-emphasised. This prompted the recommendation that there must adequate use of technology, social media, and traditional media to disseminate information about political processes, elections, and policy developments. Transparent and accessible information will enable young people to make informed decisions and actively engage in the political sphere. The recommendation for further research is that longitudinal studies should be conducted to track the long-term effects of the ENDSARS protest on youth political participation. Also, qualitative research should be done to explore the underlying motivations, experiences, and perceptions of young people regarding their political participation.

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**Ethical Approval:** All ethical approval were obtained in course of this study

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**Statement:** The data is available at:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ICbDJbvA3oBbyMM7FflwU2wgBu\\_rQpSFfrTqq3KPhQw/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ICbDJbvA3oBbyMM7FflwU2wgBu_rQpSFfrTqq3KPhQw/edit?usp=sharing)