

PEACEFUL PROTEST AND DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA: THE #ENDSARS EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In the last two decades, Nigeria has held regular elections and witnessed relatively peaceful transfers of power between the ruling party and opposition, giving the impression that democracy has come to stay in the world's most populous Black nation. At the same time, activists have continued to challenge the elected leaders on many fronts (social justice, human rights and freedoms) under different labels. This paper takes a critical look at #EndSARS as a Twitter-based mobilization of young people to expose human rights abuses perpetrated by a section of the Nigeria Police Force. In the light of the consent theory of power, the paper reviewed the literature on the century-old practice of nonviolent direction in an attempt to address the question as to whether yesterday's mobilization and training of activists under a recognized leadership has yielded to Internet-based campaigns of faceless protesters for good. Findings suggest that online activism attracts a great deal of poorly committed protesters alongside criminals with no one to take responsibility for violent outcomes. Government's regulation of social media to fight the proliferation of fake news and terrorist attacks is likely to witness a revival of offline mobilization of nonviolent activists.

Keywords: Democracy, Consent, Participation, Nigeria, Protest, #EndSARS

Introduction

In a democracy commonly understood as people's rule, citizens exercise their power in government through their elected representatives. By electing political leaders to represent their interests, they become the custodians of democracy by seeking transparency and accountability from office holders. In other words, citizens are expected to monitor the performance of those who rule on their behalf. Accordingly, the end of people's participation in government

directly or through representation is the beginning of despotism in which the will of a strongman overshadows the will of the people. Not only does democracy carry a subversive message of freedom and equality, but it must also be defended through mass rallies and civil disobedience so as not to fall back into a one-man rule. It is little wonder that the concept *demos-kratia* carries also a negative connotation that suggests a kind of rule by the poorest and most numerous class of citizen in comparison with other types of government such as monarchy,

oligarchy, plutocracy, timocracy, and the like.

Nigeria has a long history of mass protests that goes back to the colonial era. Prominent among them are the Aba women's resistance against a colonial plan to tax market women that resulted in shops, banks, and courts destroyed in 1929 and the Abeokuta women that mobilized against more proposed taxes to be levied on small traders in the 1940s. In both cases, women activists distinguished themselves by their persistence and determination to achieve their aim against all odds (Olaoluwa 2020; Okonta, 2008). Since the country's return to a democratic system of government in 1999, activists have challenged the elite on many fronts and under different labels to see to it that Nigeria aligns with international best practices. It is worth mentioning a mass demonstration dubbed #OccupyNigeria that greeted the removal of the fuel subsidy in 2012 by the Jonathan-led administration. It brought together civil rights and labour activists, opposition parties, student associations, artists, and other categories of civil societies (Obadare and Adebani, 2013). Since then, similar protests have been going on in the country, including the *Bring Back Our Girls* Campaign for the release of the Chibok girls in 2014, the #OccupyNASS, #OpenBudget, #NotTooYoughtoRun to name but a few. This paper takes a critical look at #EndSARS as a Twitter-based mobilization of young people to expose human rights abuses perpetrated by a section of the Nigeria Police Force. It relies on literature review (secondary data) revolving around the consent theory of power at the heart of democratic system of government and attempts to address the question as to whether

yesterday's mobilization and training of activists under a recognized leadership has yielded to Internet-based campaigns of faceless protesters for good.

The argument is organized into four sections. First, a brief discussion about People's rule in old democracies takes a close look at the two dominant models, namely presidential and parliamentary systems and underscores the importance of representation as citizen's participation which makes officeholders accountable to the electorate. Second, the study makes use of the consent theory of power and highlights different steps that are taken by nonviolent activists to win the hearts of their opponents before any change can take place, namely protest and persuasion, non-cooperation, and intervention. Third, the section on nonviolent action points out the peculiarities of its practice yesterday that border on the sacredness of human life, love of one's enemy, and self-discipline under a recognized leadership that commands authority over the followership. The fourth section spotlights the #EndSARS protest as a case study of online mobilization in the era of the Internet revolution to bring out its genesis, high points, and outcome. Finally, by way of drawing some critical lessons stemming from the virtual protest, the study looks at the sustainability of civil disobedience that relies heavily on Internet connectivity in the context of the war against fake news and terrorism.

People's rule in Established Democracies

Expressions such as established democracies in the Western world suggest a system of government that has been

operational for a long period. In his famous definition, Joseph Schumpeter contends that “Democracy is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by a means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” (Beetham, 1999: 2). Free and fair elections may be held and relevant institutions of government put in place but there is no democracy when a portion of the population is disenfranchised or regarded as *ignoramus* in matters of good governance. Put simply, it is not ‘multiple choices’ that matters in a democracy but how collective decisions are arrived at. To appreciate the people’s rule in practice, it is important to consider the two fashionable types of democracy that have dominated the modern world, namely parliamentary and presidential democracies. On the one hand, the parliamentary model spearheaded by the British government is carried out by the winning party through general elections. Only members of the House of Commons are elected and they represent each of the 659 constituencies in the United Kingdom. Then the ruling party members elect a Prime Minister who will, in turn, appoint his/her cabinet after due consultation with the Monarch and finally form the government. As such, parliamentary democracy takes the form of an open debate between the ruling party and the opposition. Even though the talk shop provides a framework for checks and balances, the ruling party has no obligation to change its policies to accommodate opposing views. It is not therefore surprising that the debate in the Parliament is often accompanied by a street demonstration of the general public with the protection of the police to draw

the attention of the government to the interests of the masses.

A particular feature of the presidential model of democracy practiced in the US on the other hand is that candidates compete for the Presidency, the Senate, and the House of Representatives as well as many state and local positions. It has the advantage of allocating a time limit in the office for the sake of change and progress. When it comes to checks and balances, elected officers are expected to be accountable to the electorate but in actual terms, the power shifts from the bottom up, and it is shared between the White House, the Congress, and the Supreme Court of Justice. Even though the president has the power to veto any bill passed by Congress, a two-thirds majority vote is required for the legislative arm of government to override it. On its part, the Supreme Court can declare the proceedings of Congress unconstitutional but Congress can change the Constitution through the amendment process (Hirst et.al, 1996). A similar presidential democracy as practiced in France (Republican democracy) emphasizes the fact that the three arms of government, *trias politica*, namely the legislative, executive, and judiciary hold independent powers to preclude what may look like a totalitarian system. But in practice, the chief executive (President) emerges as an elected monarch vested with veto powers over other institutions of government. As Kingsbury (2007: 115) puts it, “the chief executive may act against the legislature or other bodies of review, or may act without prior approval or consultation, claiming as justification a mandate.” Both parliamentary and presidential models of government take the form of people’s

participation through elected leaders which implies that the latter are not the only actors but people's representatives. These dominant models of democracy have been adopted in many countries outside the Western world with some degree of success measured by the regular conduct of free and fair elections, adherence to constitutional term limit for incumbents, peaceful transfer of power as well as respect for human rights and freedoms enshrined in the Supreme Law. Whatever the model of democracy in application in any country, people either support or oppose their elected leaders by their occasional mobilization to make their voices heard.

The casting of votes means more than just electing officeholders. Through electoral processes, the principle of popular sovereignty is established and it assigns to the citizens the role of custodians of democracy. As a bargaining chip, the voting power in a democracy takes the form of negotiation between the people and the government so much so that it is difficult to know who is really in charge. Whereas the people cling to their voting rights and want to have a say in decision making, elected officeholders believe that the people's vote has been a transfer of power from below up. They claim legitimacy on the mandate given to them and expect the general public to acquiesce to all that is being decided upon by the government (Randle, 2002). When citizens eventually forfeit their freedom as a result of state coercion, they lose at the same time their political leverage. Obedience (compliance) becomes the only currency available to those who want to trade with the powerful, except for the few who are not ready to abdicate their constitutional sovereignty. The ongoing

process of reconciling the 'diffused' power of the people and the 'delegated' power of the elite characterises a democratic system of government. In the next section, the power of consent at the heart of every nonviolent action provides a theoretical framework of the study.

Theoretical framework

The permanent tension between two or more groups of influence supports the consent theory of power developed by Gene Sharp (1973: 4): "the exercise of power depends on the consent of the ruled who, by withdrawing that consent, can control and even destroy the power of their opponent." Schock (2013) associates the power of consent in civil resistance with a lever through which oppressed people can defeat repressive opponents with collective actions intended to drain the legitimacy to govern by withdrawing every support whereas the ruling elite makes use of a hammer (force) to inflict pain and suffering upon the people. In other words, the ruling party constantly tries to defuse the power of the citizenry through legitimate violence (oppression) so that saying nothing equates with consenting. Michel Foucault's insight makes the consent theory more appropriate to democracy as the scholar links power to freedom and makes resistance its permanent potential: "where there is power, there is resistance... these points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (Atack, 2006: 100). If, for instance, the elected leaders act without the consent of the people, they usurp and lose their credibility. Therefore, to undermine the system that has been run without their consent (explicit or latent), the primary

sovereigns may engage in acts of civil disobedience by refusing to do what they have been forced to do (omission) or forbidden to do (commission) (Sharp, 2005: 41).

Nonviolent protesters are pro-democratic in the sense that they are the same people who were at the polling station yesterday and they are calling on the attention of their representatives over particular issues of mutual interests today. As active members of civil society, they operate in the open and have a clear agenda in mind, which is not hidden from the general public. As Sharp (2005: 370) puts it: "Openness will facilitate (but not ensure) the opponents' understanding of the nonviolent struggle group's motives, aims, intentions, and plans." Protesters are not a mob of disgruntled youth who usually express their anger and frustration through violence, resulting in acts of vandalism, pillage, and murder but an organized movement of committed individuals for social change. Neither do they constitute a political party whose ambition is to take over power nor set themselves against democratic institutions. Their initial actions involve organizing, training, and disciplining large masses of people (Nojeim: 2004: 20). Because the struggle targets exclusively policies instead of policymakers, activists are trained to identify their opponents and seek their conversion (Sharp, 2005). The training revolves around the use of selected techniques, which Gene Sharp has brought down to three categories, namely protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. According to Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher (1999: 21), the technique of protest and persuasion means that "we name what we think is wrong,

point out fingers at it and try to help others understand." This is the right of every citizen in a democratic society. No wonder that techniques such as "petitioning, picketing, demonstrating, and lobbying" are a daily occurrence in places where people enjoy the freedom of expression.

Usually, peaceful demonstrations in democratic societies have the advantage of attracting Media coverage and the service of the Police to guide activists and street protests. This brings home the message that policy-makers are in the know. The next thing to do for the protesters is to wait and see what will happen next. At this first stage, they expect the other party (government) to have a change of heart (conversion). It is unwise to stop cooperation without having publicly expressed one's dissatisfaction. In other words, the protest aims to draw the attention of political leaders to the demands of the public. If nothing is forthcoming after persuading them, committed activists resume the struggle with different techniques under the category of noncooperation: boycotts, strikes, tax resistance, and the like. Noncooperation means that "we deliberately fold our hands and turn our backs, refusing to participate in the wrong we have named" (Zunes et al., 1999: 21). Noncooperation widely observed affects both the government and the people, though at different levels.

Very often things get bad at this stage of noncooperation because it attracts different interpretations. Whereas activists freely punish themselves in the hope of appealing to their opponent's conscience, the elite in power accuses them of sabotaging democracy. What is important however is that both camps depend on

each other for survival. This is evident in the case of teachers, health workers, and transporters' strikes. They need to reach some compromise (accommodation) before the trouble goes out of hand but most of the time, the government will resort to the use of legitimate violence and repress those who oppose the status quo. So far, the people's action has been indirect and somehow ineffective. It is then that nonviolent intervention becomes direct action with techniques designed to interfere, to block the smooth running of the system such as physical obstruction, civil disobedience, parallel government, sit-ins, and the like. It is worth mentioning that these techniques are sequential steps in nonviolent struggle in the sense that one causes the other. The whole action implies popular mobilization for change by a large number of committed activists under a single leadership. The training in the discipline of nonviolence puts a premium on the sacredness of life, self-control of participants, and readiness to compromise with one's opponent. The following section provides a brief description of nonviolent action in practice.

A brief history of Nonviolent Direct Action

The history of nonviolent action spans over more than a century. From the people strike in Russia to the Indian movement for self-rule, the campaign for civil rights in America, and civil disobedience against Apartheid in South Africa to name but a few, peaceful protests have brought down the walls of oppression, division, and exploitation. In each case, there was an identified leader of a movement that attracted a crowd of

followers committed to bringing about social, economic, and political change. The following excerpt is worth mentioning:

On a cold, clear Sunday morning in January 1905, in the industrial outskirts of St. Petersburg, a young long-haired priest stood before several thousand factory workers. Father Georgii Gapon read a prayer, said a blessing over everyone, and then asked if anyone was armed. When the answer was no, he was pleased. 'Good. We will go unarmed to our Tsar'... Then, on the spacious, classically proportioned square outside the palace, in the heart of the capital of the Russian empire, they would present a petition to Nicholas II (Ackerman and Duvall 2000: 16).

Heeding the call for resistance to the status quo, Muscovites of all kinds congregated at the university and the Technical Institute where workers, social agitators, students, and professionals hobnobbed with tradesmen, police spies, and peddlers (Ackerman et al. 2000:38). This pattern of unarmed followers coming behind a leader and together marching toward the seat of power with a clear determination to secure their rights and freedoms characterizes yesterday's nonviolent movements that played out offline. As the cases of the Gandhi-led movement for the independence of India as well as the Civil Rights movement under Martin Luther King Jr testify, the success of collective movements depends on several prerogatives. These include (1) leadership with a vision for a better society; (2) readiness of followers to get

adequate training before exercising their constitutional right to protest; (3) expectation of a violent response from opponents (government); (4) sustained commitment of activists in the face of growing brutality; (5) attraction of other segments of the society to the movement that magnifies the demand for change; (6) under public pressure, the immediate reaction from the government in terms of legislation codifying the needed reform.

To begin with, Gandhi spent a great deal of his energy urging his followers to overcome the fear that comes with cadaverous compliance and reclaim the power of consent at their disposal. His experience with segregation in South Africa and British rule in India taught him that the imperialists were not living up to their professed ideals. He then challenged his countrymen and women to rebel against themselves and warned them that “those who behave like worms should not blame others for trampling upon them” (Parekh, 1997: 9). For him, the final arbiter is not the military might of the colonizer but the consent of the people, and the cooperation that flows from it: “I believe and everybody must grant that no Government can exist for a single moment without the cooperation of the people, willing or forced, and if people withdraw their cooperation in every detail, the Government will come to a standstill” (Schell, 2004: 129). Against a passive resistance common to oppressed people all over the world, Gandhi adopts a strategy of self-liberation known as *satyagraha*, a combination of the Sanskrit word *sat* – truth- and *graha* – holding firm to. It was for him an experiment with the truth, a search for truth both within and in the other. Each *satyagraha* launched against the British pursued one

goal: shaming rather than destroying the opponent, with the possibility of reaching a dialogue. That is why Gandhi embarked on prolonged fasting as a way of atoning for one’s misdeeds. As he puts, it: “I am essentially a man of compromise because I am never sure that I am right” (Schell, 2004: 68). Although none of the campaigns registered between 1920 and 1942 succeeded in dislodging the opponents, they were instrumental to the development of the national identity shared by Indians today (Powers and Vogel, 1997).

The Civil Rights movement that became famous under the leadership of Martin Luther King has its genesis in the love of one’s enemy that was preached by Jesus, studied by Tolstoy, and practiced by Gandhi (Nojeim, 2004). Likewise Gandhi, King admonished his followers to desist from the use of violent means in confronting the Leviathan (government). He developed his philosophy of nonviolence after he was chosen to lead the Montgomery bus boycott (1955) and used it as a tactic to win the Civil Rights of the African Americans with no intention of undermining the US government. King captured the issue of racial discrimination as a political configuration in which everybody was caught up in the web of oppression: both oppressors and oppressed needed to be liberated from alienation. According to Powers and Vogel (1997: 90), “King posited that through nonviolence, African Americans could end racial oppression, free themselves and their white oppressors from the sin of racial discrimination and then build a beloved community based on equality and Christian love.” Likewise his mentor Gandhi, King had a clear idea of who the opponent was and how to face

him or her. He led nonviolent protests with the purpose of stirring up tension which would in the end compel the American government to open the doors to negotiations: “We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering... One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process and our victory will be a double victory” (Powers and Vogel, 1997: 291). Accordingly, the success of the civil rights struggle lied in the capacity for the oppressed people to renounce the use of violence while freeing themselves from fear and hatred to be able to disarm their oppressors with love (agape). Thanks to the media coverage, the Birmingham demonstration (1963) exposed the shortcoming of American democracy in providing a level playing field for all to thrive and it forced President Kennedy to propose the bill which would be adopted as the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Both struggles for Indian independence and the Civil Rights of African Americans testify to the fact that important changes in the legislation of countries (democratic and non-democratic alike) are neither given on a platter of gold nor an indication of politicians' goodwill. Put simply, social changes are the result of ordinary peoples that put their life on the line and resist the status quo.

Since 1999 Nigeria has embraced the American model of presidential democracy with a bicameral parliament and separation of power between the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary arms of government. In the last two decades, this former British colony in West Africa has held regular elections and

witnessed peaceful transfers of power either within the same political party or between the ruling party and opposition, giving the impression that democracy has come to stay in the world's most populous Black nation. The right to freedom of assembly and association is guaranteed under section 40 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, the 1981 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the 1998 Protocol on the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights as well as other international laws. It is pertinent to recall however that the military regime of General Obasanjo decreed on 16 February 1979 the Public Order Act as one of the laws designed to control public assemblies, meetings, and processions in Nigeria. The Act empowers state governments to not only issue a license to any association that plans to hold a public gathering but also prescribe the route by which and the times at which such event takes place for maintaining public order (ILO 2021). Under the military regime of General Babaginda in 1992, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) created a special unit within the State Criminal Investigation and Intelligence Department to be known as Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The mask-wearing officers of SARS were charged with the mandate of curbing the spate of armed robberies and related crimes in the country. With time, SARS became synonymous with impunity as the anonymous nature of the unit emboldens its officers to act with little fear of punishment, extending their field of operation (combatting armed robbery) to cybercrime. The next section of the study takes a critical look at the recent protest in Nigeria by highlighting the genesis, peak, and outcome of #EndSARS.

Spotlighting #EndSARS Protest in Nigeria

The power of the Internet in the hands of citizens is such that it triggered the 2011 Arab Spring which not only propelled the downfall of long-time dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya but also set up a benchmark for connective activism worldwide. In a matter of few months, the Occupy Wall Street movement brought thousands of activists in Zuccotti Park, New York City to protest against economic inequality vehicled by multinational corporations. The connective mobilization spread quickly as a bushfire and paralysed many financial districts in the world, including, Hong Kong, Singapore, London where protesters were seen occupying banks, corporate headquarters, board meetings among other things (Wikipedia). In Nigeria, the removal of the fuel subsidy in 2012 by the Jonathan-led administration was greeted with a mass demonstration dubbed #OccupyNigeria. Such a mass protest brought together civil rights and labour activists, opposition parties, student associations, artists, and other categories of civil societies (Obadare and Adebani, 2013). Since then, similar protests have been going on in Nigeria, including the *Bring Back Our Girls* Campaign for the release of the Chibok girls in 2014, the #OccupyNASS, #OpenBudget, #NotTooYoughtoRun to name but a few.

In 2007, the Abuja Court of Appeal quashed the 1979 Public Order Act by recognising the right to freely assemble without a police permit under the democratic dispensation but in practice, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) has continued to stifle peaceful protests

by either harassing or arresting activists (Uwandu 2020). The new millennium ushered in the democratization of Information Communication Technology (ICT) with its attendant rise in cybercrime involving mainly unemployed youth and young graduates. According to many analysts, suspected fraudsters do not carry firearms but cash and digital gadgets (mobile phones, laptops, debit cards). They are good-looking young men who display wealth: they wear expensive designs with tattoos and hairstyles, drive luxurious cars, and own mansions in cities and towns around the country. From 2009 onward, youngsters that were popularly known as 'Yahoo Boys,' became an easy target of police harassment, unlawful profiling, extortion, torture and even killing in the name of combatting Internet fraud. According to Ojewale (2020), aggrieved youth made repeated calls to the government for the disbandment of SARS in 2014, 2015, and 2016. In 2017, a petition signed by 10,195 people was submitted to the National Assembly and it received the backing of a few Senators for termination of SARS' mandate. In response to the campaign against this anti-robbery squad, the police hierarchy embarked on reforms designed to overhaul and decentralize the command but no errant officer was brought to justice for taking the law into their own hands.

On 3 October 2020, video footage allegedly showing the killing of a young man in Ughelli Delta State by SARS officers caused public outcry on social media and as a result, more than 28 million tweets bearing the hashtag #EndSARS in wide solidarity of Nigerians in diaspora and at home were recorded. Five days later, young people gathered in

front of the Government House in Ikeja, Lagos State. Those in Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) did the same by camping peacefully in front of the Nigeria Police Force headquarters, demanding once again the end of SARS. Following a nationwide protest and attempts by the police to brutally disperse activists with tear gas and water cannons, the Inspector General of Police, Mohammed Adamu eventually announced on 11 October, the dissolution of SARS. The move was first seen as a triumph of demonstrations but it prompted the protesters to demand justice for the victims of police brutality and better working conditions for the uniform men and women. In a five-point demand, the youth demanded (1) immediate release of all arrested activists, (2) justice and compensation for the victims of police brutality (3) an independent panel of inquiry of prosecution of errant officers (4) psychological test and retraining of SARS operatives before their deployment to other police units, (5) adequate remuneration of officers of the Nigerian police. On Tuesday 13 October, the Public Relations Officer of the NPF announced the creation of a Special Weapon and Tactics Team (SWAT) to replace SARS (Wikipedia). Meanwhile, the street protest intensified and it forced the police to retreat from the scene, opening the door to the disgruntled youth to go on a rampage, destroying property owned by the elite in power, looting shops and warehouses. At this critical juncture on October 15, the Nigerian army was called in to deal with troublemakers, especially in Lagos State. According to Amnesty International and Human Right Watch, the shooting spree at the Lekki Toll gate, Lagos claimed at least 12 people dead and many wounded

(Aljazeera 2020). Similar reports of violent crackdowns on protesters in different parts of the country by uniform men emerged from several sources that are not necessarily credible, thanks to the democratization of information.

Lessons learned from online mobilization

One thing is to gather signatures virtually at no cost and another thing is to manage a crowd of protesters that occupies a street in a big city for a laudable cause because they lack basic training and skills in the art of protest and persuasion. Unlike traditional movements in which co-protesters share strong ties as a result of years of training in the skills of nonviolence, #EndSARS protesters were strangers to one another. The movement would have attracted all sections of the society given that a victim of SARS' brutality can be a brother, husband, son, a colleague of someone else and by extension, and a member of a larger community but it turned out to be a kind of generational identity made of youngsters alone (Urich 2012). Comparatively, the Civil Rights Movement in the US was not exclusive of the Blacks people but it attracted white fellows, middle-class citizens. Close to us, the Arab Spring that witnessed the downfall of long-standing dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, or Yemen was a conglomerate of citizens from different backgrounds including doctors, lawyers, retired men and women, and children. Even the #Black Lives Matter was not exclusively a Black People movement but it attracted all sections of the American population. Put differently, a credible protest requires the participation of all

sections of the society for a common cause, not just a few which can easily be sidelined. Needless to say that security agents show sympathy for the masses and eventually change camps when the majority of the population join hands to peacefully demand social change. Success in many cases depends on the conversion of the military and police forces as they identify with their family members and friends of the same society (Mbombo 2018). Today's activists are ready to join a popular movement that decries injustice regardless of nationality, religion, or culture but they do not identify with a particular leadership that embodies inspiration and commitment with a clear vision of what is achievable. Put simply, online mobilisation draws thousands of activists that are both leaders and followers by simply pressing a send key on their preferred electronic gadgets wherever they find themselves.

Little wonder that virtual protest is gaining currency as the preferred form of activism for a lazy generation of activists, also known as slacktivists or clicktivists. Morozov (2009) as cited in Dambo et al (2020: 3) defines slacktivism, which is a combination of slacker and activism, as a "sensational type of activism that begins and ends online without significant impact in the world." Being a leaderless movement, #EndSARS relied strictly on Twitter with little offline activity. According to DW (2020), the movement was disorganized because there was no leader at the helm: "protesters have rejected the idea of turning anyone into 'a face' of these protests, fearing that once they have a head, it will be decapitated politically." Even a certain human rights activist, Segun Awosanya who distinguished himself in mobilizing

resources to secure the release of protesters operated behind a veiled identity of 'segalink.com' before resigning as online leader after realizing that the protest had been hijacked for other purposes (TheNation 2020). Consequently, youth protesters were subject to manipulation not only by aggrieved politicians but also by their peers through the dissemination of unverified information and graphic photomontage of unlawful arrest, torture, and even killing to attract sympathizers to the cause of the revolution. Moreover, the rising tide of terrorist attacks in cities and towns makes it difficult for unguided nonviolent protesters to fend off criminals that would take advantage of mass movements to strike.

Both the government and the protesters exonerated themselves by blaming criminals that hijacked the movement instead of admitting their respective responsibilities. As Dambo et al. (2020: 6) observe, "Nigerian government will never look at issues raised during a protest. Instead, they will be after who is sponsoring it. Then, they will look for how to discredit it." Whether outsiders are called hoodlums and political thugs hired to vandalise public infrastructures and intimidate peaceful activists, or looters of shops and warehouses, they are the same youth that desperately roams the streets with nothing to lose today. They will gather together tomorrow as activists without prior training in nonviolent action. Even though Internet has allowed its voiceless users to get the attention of the elite by disseminating information and causing civil unrest, it is fast becoming the new battlefield where the government is waging war against merchants of fake

news. It is noteworthy that the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is considering the 'Protection from Internet Falsehoods and Manipulations Bill' sponsored by Senator Mohammed Sani Musa on 5 November 2019 to stem the tide of fake news in the Country. The Bill has scaled the second reading in the Senate and if voted into law, this Anti-social Media Bill which will provide a framework regulating the use of the Internet and its intermediaries for the transmission of information in Nigeria (PLAC 2021). It is therefore likely that the regulation of Internet connectivity will compromise the future of online mobilization for action.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to appraise #EndSARS Protest in Nigeria by first reviewing the literature on nonviolent direct action premised on the consent theory of power and its practice yesterday with a focus on two historic figures, namely Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King to learn lessons for the sustainability of online campaign. Offline activists were expected to undergo long periods of preparation, training, and mobilization. Mass rallies and gatherings allowed protesters to disseminate information through the distribution of leaflets and public display of posters and banners because the purpose of nonviolent action is, first of all, to draw the attention of policymakers (government) to what must be changed for the people to feel secure and protected. Because it is not enough to carry banners with captions, which is only a step in a long chain of actions, committed protesters must step up efforts to get what they want while

maintaining self-discipline. Against this background #EndSARS stands out as a typical case study of a twitter-based mobilisation that displayed a generational identity, exclusively open to young people that were poorly trained and ill-motivated. Once in the streets, 'lazy' activists were easily overtaken by the mob of disgruntled youth that went into a rampage and no one could take responsibility for the loss of lives and destruction of property in various states of the Federation. Moreover, the movement of slacktivists was sustained by the dissemination of information that escaped official channels and censorship. Therefore the regulation of Internet connectivity is likely to cause the revival of offline civil disobedience of trained followers under a charismatic leader.

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