

POLICE BRUTALITY AND PUBLIC TRUST AFTER THE ENDSARS PROTEST IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The glaring contradiction of security forces violating the very human rights they are mandated to protect has created a severe crisis of public trust. This research investigates the persistence of police brutality and the restoration of public trust following the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. The study focuses on three main objectives: to examine the prevalence of police brutality, to identify the strategies implemented to prevent it, and to assess the impact of the EndSARS protest on police conduct in the Ibadan metropolis. Guided by Institutional Theory, which explains how organizational norms resist external pressure for change. The study employed a mixed-methods approach. Data were gathered through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews across selected areas in Ibadan. A sample size of 383 was determined using Cochran's formula, and 375 copies were retrieved and duly analysed using SPSS version 26. The thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data from interview. Findings indicate that despite the protests, police brutality continues to thrive. Furthermore, a majority of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with government measures such as judicial panels, psychiatric screening, and improved welfare, labelling them as insufficient. The study concludes that while the EndSARS protest successfully raised awareness of human rights abuses, it has not significantly reformed police conduct in Ibadan. The study recommended that there remains a pressing need for community policing, robust independent oversight and a fundamental shift in police organisational culture.

Keywords: EndSARS protest, police brutality, public trust, Institutional Theory, Human Rights

Introduction

Security services are essential to the fabric of any nation, playing a vital role in safeguarding lives and property. The police, in particular, are responsible for investigating crimes, arresting suspects, and maintaining internal law and order (Olukoya, 2020). Despite these responsibilities, the Nigerian Police Force has been criticized for the brutalization of citizens and the violation of professional ethics (Imegi, 2023).

Globally, the use of excessive force by police during protests, arrests, and policing of vulnerable communities is alarming (Onuoha & Obiora, 2021). In Europe, incidents of police brutality have also garnered significant attention (Anaekwe, & Oli, 2024). While police forces in many European countries are often seen as more accountable due to established rule-of-law frameworks and democratic oversight, several high-profile cases have emerged in recent years (Okoro, 2021). For instance, the tragic death of Adama Traoré, a 46-year-old Black man, in France after being detained by police in 2016 ignited widespread protests against police violence and systemic racism (Hassan, 2024). Statistics from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) indicate that ethnic minorities in Europe, particularly Roma and Black communities, are disproportionately affected by police violence. In a 2018 FRA report (Pavid, Conlm, & Manriques, 2020), 35% of Roma respondents reported having been subjected to police violence or abuse, compared to only 10% of the general population (Anaekwe, & Oli, 2024). According to the Mapping Police Violence database, 1,134 people were killed by police in 2020 alone, with Black people representing 25% of those fatalities despite making up only 13% of the U.S. population (Olufemi & Ogunmodede, 2021).

In the African context, police brutality is a significant concern across several nations. In Ghana, a relatively stable West African democracy, incidents of police violence during protests, youth interactions, and law enforcement operations have raised alarms, including the 2020 controversy over the killings of three unarmed youths in the Ghana (Onuoha & Obiora, 2021). Similar issues occur elsewhere: South African police have killed hundreds annually ((Uwazuruike, 2020), while Kenyan police were linked to 118 extrajudicial killings in 2024 alone (Famakin-Johnson, 2022).

In Nigeria, police brutality is deeply rooted in its colonial history and has long involved violence, corruption, and human rights abuses (Ogunmodede, 2020). The problem peaked with the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), formed in 1992 but infamous for extrajudicial

killings, torture, and extortion. This sparked the #EndSARS protests in 2020. Despite the unit's official disbandment, abuses persist. Amnesty International recorded at least 82 SARS-related cases of torture and killings, while earlier estimates suggested over 10,000 police killings between 2000 and 2007 (Chikadibia, 2023). Security forces killed dozens during the 2020 protests, and reports of daily violations continue years later (United Nations, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2020). The Nigerian Constitution prohibits torture and upholds human dignity, yet impunity and weak oversight sustain the gap between law and practice. The #EndSARS protest, which gained momentum in October 2020, was a direct response to these abuses (Olufemi & Ogunmodede, 2021). The protest initially focused on disbanding SARS but quickly evolved into a larger call for comprehensive police reform and an end to systemic violence within the Nigerian Police Force (Olufemi & Ogunmodede, 2021). Protests erupted across the country, with demonstrators demanding justice for victims of police brutality and greater accountability for law enforcement officers (Onuoha & Obiora, 2021). The protests, however, were met with violent repression by the Nigerian government. This incident led to a state-citizen response calling for justice, which sparked widespread condemnation both within Nigeria and internationally (Olukoya, 2020).

Furthermore, existing studies on police brutality in Nigeria have largely focused on the institutional and structural factors that contribute to this phenomenon, with limited attention paid to the experiential and perceptual dimensions of police brutality after the EndSARS protest in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the prevalence of police brutality after EndSARS, find out the strategies put in place to prevent police brutality after the EndSars movement and assess the impact of EndSars Protest on police brutality in Ibadan Metropolis.

Institutional Theory

This study anchored on the institutional theory that provides more explanation of the phenomenon of the police brutality specifically in Ibadan metropolis of Oyo state, Nigeria. Institutional theory emerged primarily from the field of sociology and organizational studies. Key proponents include John W. Meyer, Brian Rowan, Paul DiMaggio, and Walter Powell (Imegi, 2023). Their works in the 1970s and 1980s focused on how institutions shape the behaviour of individuals and organisations, not merely through direct control or incentives but through shared beliefs, practices, and cultural norms. Institutional theory suggests that the structures, rules, and norms within a society, organisation, or sector influence the

behaviour and strategies of actors, often leading to conformity rather than efficiency-driven decisions. The theory also posits that organisations are influenced by the institutional environment in which they operate, driven by a need for legitimacy rather than purely technical efficiency. In this context, institutional theory helps to understand how organizations, including the police, operate within a broader system of societal values, practices, and norms that are established over time. It highlights how institutions adapt and respond to pressures, both internal (e.g., organisational rules) and external (e.g., public opinion, government policies).

In the context of the Nigerian police, the "force" is coercively isomorphic to the military due to its colonial origins and the militarisation of policing. This makes the transition to service-oriented civil police difficult. Institutions shape social reality by constructing norms, values, and symbols that influence actors' perceptions and behaviour. Loose Coupling (Decoupling) occurs when organisations adopt formal structures (Police reform) to gain legitimacy but ignore them in their daily operations to maintain stability. This explains why the Nigerian government might announce reforms to placate the public (legitimacy), while officers on the ground continue with brutal practices (operational reality).

Critique of Institutional Theory

Limited Focus on Agency: Institutional theory tends to downplay the role of individual agency and micro-level interactions. It emphasises the influence of structures and norms but fails to fully account for the capacity of individuals within the police force (e.g., officers) to resist, change, or challenge harmful practices. Institutional theory suggests that institutions are slow to change due to deeply embedded norms. However, this may not fully capture the complexities of grassroots movements like EndSARS, where the public's actions can directly challenge and disrupt entrenched systems. The theory often assumes that organisations and individuals simply conform to norms and rules, but it doesn't address the way in which individuals or groups innovate, defy norms, or push for transformation (Imegi, 2023).

Despite the criticism, it can be applied in this study. For instance, the EndSARS protests in Nigeria, which demanded the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) due to widespread police brutality, serve as an example of how institutional norms and practices can perpetuate problems. From an institutional theory perspective, police brutality can be understood as a result of institutionalised practices within the Nigerian Police Force, where

certain harmful practices (e.g., extrajudicial killings, torture) became normalised and entrenched over time.

Methods

The study adopted a survey design using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative strategies. A structured questionnaire served as the primary instrument for data collection, supplemented by interviews. The population of Ibadan Metropolis was estimated at 4,004,000 (projected at a 3.33% growth rate; United Nations World Population Prospects, 2024). Using Cochran's formula, a sample size of 383 was determined. A multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, all five Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Ibadan Metropolis were selected. In the second stage, two wards were systematically randomly selected from each LGA. This resulted in the selection of 10 wards: Agbowo and Oke-Offa (Ibadan North); Orita and Monatan (Ibadan North East); Oluyole and Onireke (Ibadan North West); Apata and Oke-Ado (Ibadan South East); and Olunde and Iyaganku (Ibadan South West).

To reach respondents within the selected wards, convenience sampling was combined with snowball sampling. Researchers stationed themselves at strategic locations such as markets, community centres, and transport hubs, approaching eligible participants. Respondents were also asked to refer others who met the inclusion criteria. Out of 383 questionnaires administered, 375 were retrieved and valid for analysis (97.9% response rate).

The study collected both quantitative and qualitative data from residents, human rights activists, police officers, and lawyers. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (percentages, mean, and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (chi-square test) with SPSS version 26. Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis. The combination of multistage systematic sampling with convenience and snowball techniques was adopted due to practical challenges in Ibadan Metropolis, including the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, security concerns, and difficulties accessing certain populations. This approach ensured broader coverage and improved respondent reach while maintaining a systematic foundation at the ward-selection stage. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for respondents' privacy and rights.

Result

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	F (N=375)	Percent (100%)
Sex		
Male	229	61.1
Female	146	38.9
Age		
18-25	47	12.5
26-35	97	25.9
36-45	121	32.3
46-55	61	16.3
56-65	45	12.0
66 and above	4	1.1
Occupation		
Student	68	18.1
Civil servant	110	29.3
Unemployed	140	37.3
Private sector	57	15.2
Qualification		
Non formal	40	10.7
FSLC	38	10.1
SSCE	78	20.8
Degree	97	25.9
Post Graduate	122	32.5

Source: Field work, 2025

The table above contains data on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The data on the sex of the respondents shows that 61.1% of them are males and 38.9% are females. With this, it shows that the study is not gender biased. The data on age indicates that 12.5% (47) belong to the age range of 18-25, 25.9% (97) were within the 26-35 range, while

32.3% (121) were in the age range of 36-45, 16.3% (61) belong to the range of 46-55, 12.0% (45) belong to 56-65, and 1.1% (4) are within the age range of 66 and above. This implies that the study covered respondents of different age ranges, specifically adults capable of providing credible information on the topic under investigation. The data on occupation shows that 18.1% (68) are students, 15.2% (57) are in the private sector, while 37.3% (140) are unemployed and 29.3% (110) are civil servants. The data on the educational status of respondents revealed the following figures: Respondents with no formal education 10.7% (40), respondents with FSLC as their academic attainment stand at 10.1% (38), respondents who studied up to senior secondary school certificate (SSCE) at 20.8% (78), respondents who studied up to the tertiary level (degree) at 25.9% (97), and respondents who were post graduates are 32.5% (122). The data shows that the largest category is that of post graduates.

Table 2: Prevalence of Police Brutality after EndSars Protest in Ibadan metropolis

Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	Ma n	SD	Decision
Before EndSars protests, police brutality was a frequent issue in Ibadan metropolis	22.2 (83)	47.0 (176)	19.2 (72)	11.6 (44)	2.80	.918	Accept
I witness or experience police brutality since EndSars protest	21.7 (81)	45.5 (171)	17.7 (66)	15.2 (57)	2.74	.967	Accept
Since EndSars protest, there has been decrease in police brutality in Ibadan	13.1 (49)	11.1 (42)	35.4 (133)	40.4 (151)	2.03	.022	Reject
Total					2.53	.96	Accept

Source: Field work, 2025

The table on the prevalence of police brutality after the EndSARS protest in Ibadan metropolis reveals that police brutality was already a frequent issue before the protests, as 69.2% of respondents either strongly agreed (22.2%, n=83) or agreed (47.0%, n=176), while 30.8% disagreed. Similarly, since the EndSARS protest, a combined 67.2% of participants reported witnessing police brutality (21.7% strongly agreed, n=81; 45.5% agreed, n=171). Regarding whether the EndSARS protest helped reduce police brutality, the majority (75.8%)

disagreed (40.4% strongly disagreed, n=151; 35.4% disagreed, n=133), with only 24.2% agreeing that there has been a decrease. Overall, the findings indicate that police brutality remains prevalent in Ibadan both before and after the protests. This is statistically significant, with a total mean score of 2.52 and a standard deviation of 0.96, which exceeds the cut-off point of 2.50.

In a qualitative study, key informant interviews were also collected to complement the quantitative data above on the subject matter. In view of this, one of the respondents, a community leader of Oluyole Estate and a barrister by profession, age 64, responded that:

I have not witnessed police brutality, but I have had instances and cases of police brutality even against the noble profession of law. It still prevails. According to the speaker, police brutality reduced after the protest, but later it started again, especially when they want to take confessions from individuals; they beat up people and injure them. Police brutality has not stopped but has taken a new form or manner" (KII, 2025).

Another respondent from Iyaganku, age 35, also said that:

I have seen many cases of police brutality, one of which is the extortion of money. According to the speaker, the main cause of police brutality is gratification; they just want to make gains for their pockets" (KII, 2025).

The above views were in line with the quantitation data. This deeply explained the reality that police brutality is prevalence despite the EndSars protest in Nigeria.

Say something that synthesizes both the quantitative and qualitative data. Don't leave open this way. This applies to all other sections under data presentation

Table 3: Respondents Responses on the Strategies to Prevent Police Brutality

Item description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Decision
I am aware of the strategies put in place to prevent police brutality	27.3 (54)	20.7 (78)	33.8 (127)	18.2 (68)	2.57	1.07	Accept
Establishing judicial panel of inquiry help to prevent police brutality	6.1 (23)	15.7(59))	32.3 (121)	46.0(172)	1.82	.91	Reject
The psychiatric profiling and drug testing conducted help in reducing police brutality	7.6 (29)	12.6 (47)	38.4 (144)	41.4 (155)	1.86	.91	Reject
Improving the welfare and funding of the Nigeria police help to prevent police brutality and ethical conduct	9.1 (34)	16.7 (68)	29.3 (110)	44.9 (168)	2.10	.98	Reject
The prohibition of Sars prevents police brutality in Ibadan metropolis	5.1 (19)	21.2 (80)	38.9 (146)	34.8 (130)	2.03	.87	Reject
The strategies implemented by the government on police brutality are sufficient to prevent future police brutality	113.6 (51)	119.7 (74)	229 (110)	337.4 (140)	2.10	1.05	Reject
Total					1.91	.81	Reject

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 3 examines respondents' views on strategies to prevent police brutality in Ibadan metropolis. Awareness of existing strategies was low, with only 48% of respondents agreeing they were aware, while a slight majority (52%) disagreed. Most participants expressed scepticism toward proposed measures: a large majority rejected the effectiveness of judicial panels of inquiry (78.3% disagreed), psychiatric profiling and drug testing (79.8% disagreed), improving police welfare and funding (44.9% disagreed), and the prohibition of SARS (73.7% disagreed). Similarly, 66.7% disagreed that the government's current strategies are sufficient to prevent future police brutality. Overall, the findings indicate low confidence in the various strategies implemented or proposed to curb police brutality in the area.

In qualitative data, using the Key Informant Interview is in tandem with the quantitative data on this variable. For instance, one respondent, a community leader and barrister aged 64, said:

I am not aware of any strategies. I do not think that these strategies are effective enough, as police brutality still prevails even in the community. I would advise that there should be modern ways in which brutality can be captured, i.e., by the installation of CCTV cameras in their respective stations. It may bring a little solution and sanity" (KII, 2025).

Related to the above, another respondent from Iyaganku, age 35, also said:

I am aware of some of the strategies, which include the training of officers and the psychiatric profiling of officers. They are not effective; personally, [brutality] cannot be stopped even in advanced countries. It can only be reduced and cannot be eradicated. Despite the increment in salaries, there are still bad eggs among them; one way or the other, they would affect the good ones. Profiling would help, but it is not effective. A lot of officers smoke and take cannabis while on duty, which is wrong" (KII, 2025).

Table4: Respondents Responses on the Impact of EndSars protest on Police brutality in Ibada Metropolis

Item description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D	Decision
The EndSars protest led to decrease in case of police brutality	16.2 (61)	21.7 (81)	28.8 (108)	33.3 (125)	2.21	1.07	Reject
The End-Sars protests improved public trust on police performance	11.6 (44)	20.2 (76)	48.5 (182)	19.7 (74)	2.23	.98	Reject
The End-Sars protest led to awareness of Human right abuses committed by police	12.1 (45)	48.0 (180)	18.2 (68)	21.7 (82)	2.251	.96	Accept
The End-Sars accelerated the push for judicial police reform	14.6 (55)	46.5 (174)	14.1 (53)	24.7 (93)	2.51	1.02	Accept
Total					2.37	1.01	

Source: Field Work, 2025

The EndSARS protest had mixed impacts on police brutality in Ibadan Metropolis, according to respondents. On one hand, the majority (62.1%) disagreed that the protest led to a decrease in cases of police brutality, with a mean score of 2.21 indicating no significant positive change in this area. Similarly, a larger proportion of respondents (68.2%) disagreed that the protest improved public trust in police performance, suggesting that distrust between the public and law enforcement has actually widened rather than improved. On the other hand, a significant majority (60.1%) agreed that the protest heightened awareness of human rights abuses committed by the police. Likewise, most respondents (61.1%) acknowledged that the EndSARS protest accelerated the push for judicial police reforms, as reflected in a mean score of 2.51. Overall, while the protest was viewed as effective in creating awareness and advocating for reforms, it was largely seen as unsuccessful in reducing police brutality or restoring public confidence in the police.

The qualitative data via Key Informant Interview was also conducted to complement the quantitative data above on the subject matter. In view of this, one of the respondents, a community leader of Oluyole Estate and a barrister by profession, age 64, responded that:

No, initially the police pretended to have been cowed down. They were doing well, but now they are fully back in their obnoxious acts. And at times they are being used by the government. The protest was unable to achieve the desired aim. The gap between the public and the police grows every day, even with the training. They do not keep to it in practice. They go around with their obnoxious acts ready to victimise anybody" (KII, 2025).

Another respondent from Iyaganku, age 35, also said that:

No, the EndSARS protest has not achieved the aim or goal it meant to. This is because there is a rise in inhuman treatment by police in Ibadan. The innocent ones suffer, and the guilty ones get away because they have money. It has not improved public trust in the police. It has only made people more aware, more conscious of the fact that when dealing with the police, one should be careful. The distrust in the security agent is much wider than ever before, so everyone knows that the police are not your friend. Even the idea that bail is free, bail is not free. They do not even take 5k anymore; it is now 10k (KII, 2025).

Test of Hypotheses

Table 5: Chi-square result showing impact of the EndSars protest on police brutality in Ibadan metropolis

Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic sided)	Significance (2-
Pearson Chi-Square	99.104 ^a	9	.007	
Likelihood Ratio	104.441	9	.000	
Linear-by-Linear Association	53.401	1	.000	
N of Valid Cases	375			

a. 5 cells (31.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.56.

The result indicates that the chi-square = 99.104, at df = 9, p = .007. Since the value is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis, which stated that the End SARS protest has no significant impact on police brutality in Ibadan metropolis, is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This implies that the EndSARS protest has a statistically significant impact on police brutality in Ibadan Metropolis (specifically, in terms of raising awareness and discourse, as shown in the descriptive results).

Table 6: Chi-square result showing impact of the strategies in preventing police brutality in Ibadan metropolis.

Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic sided)	Significance (2-
Pearson Chi-Square	68.333 ^a	9	0.06	
Likelihood Ratio	76.645	9	.005	
Linear-by-Linear Association	35.707	1	.000	
N of Valid Cases	375			

a. 3 cells (18.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.00.

The table above presents the chi-square result of the impact of the strategies in preventing police brutality in Ibadan metropolis. The result shows that the chi-square = 68.333, at $df = 9$, $p = 0.06$. Since the value is greater than the alpha level of 0.05, this means that the null hypothesis, which states that strategies put in place by the government have no significant impact in preventing police brutality, is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. This means the strategies put in place have not yielded a positive outcome in curbing police brutality in the area.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that there is a high prevalence of police brutality in the area despite the EndSARS protest in the country, specifically in the Ibadan Metropolis of Oyo State. Based on the descriptive and qualitative data, it was revealed that there has been no significant decrease or difference in the cases of police brutality in Ibadan Metropolis. This finding was consistent with the qualitative data derived from interviews with community leaders, who also agreed that there are instances of police brutality against citizens. Also, this finding corresponds with Dambaba et al., (2025), who agrees that there is a prevalence of police brutality and further explains the reasons for the prevalence as being systemic, personal, and organisational.

The study found that the strategies adopted in preventing police brutality are ineffective and inefficient in curbing police brutality in the area. This is because the majority of respondents in both quantitative and qualitative data collected were not aware of the strategies; hence, the inaction of police officers persists. In other words, despite some respondents being aware of the strategies, such strategies failed to yield desirable and positive results in preventing the re-occurrence of police brutality. This finding is in tandem with Dambaba et al., (2023), who also discussed how strategies are ineffective and how, the absence of effective monitoring or checks and balances can lead to re-occurrence. This can be explained by Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), which provided valuable insight into how the lack of proper institutional reforms and monitoring mechanisms is absent and ineffective, which can lead to deviance and, in this case, re-occurrence.

The study found that the EndSARS protest had no positive impact on preventing the re-occurrence of police brutality in the area. It was also found that public trust towards the police was relatively low. This means the public still frowns at the unethical behaviour of the police officers. Members of the public show little trust in their capabilities in terms of

performance. In other words, it was found that the EndSARS protest have no significant influence on police brutality in the area. The Chi-square statistical analysis further affirmed that the protest had no significant impact on police brutality in Ibadan metropolis in terms of reducing the actual act, though it successfully raised awareness. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Ecoma (2023), who averred that the EndSARS protest has brought about no positive change; hence, the police officers continue with their dehumanising attitudes. This is best explained by Institutional Theory, which highlights how institutionalised practices (brutality) resist change despite external pressure (protests.).

Conclusion

This study investigates the perception of the public on police brutality after the EndSARS protest in Ibadan Metropolis. The study reveals that there is no significant improvement in the relationship between the public and the police. The EndSARS protest was unable to achieve one of its aims; instead, it has built a wider gap of distrust between the police and the public. All of these have been validated through statistical and qualitative data. Police brutality has not been curbed, as it has taken a modified form or pattern. Failure to strengthen the relationship to foster accountability, transparency, and ethical behaviour would lead to disillusionment from the public toward the police. The Nigerian police need to be transparent; an individual would find it difficult to build a relationship with someone they do not know.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are considered relevant in line with the findings made about the study:

- a) Community policing and engagement: The Nigeria police commission should implement community policing strategies that foster trust, understanding, and cooperation between the police and the community.
- b) Police Accountability and Oversight: The Nigeria police commission should establish robust accountability mechanisms to investigate and prosecute cases of police brutality.
- c) Human Rights Training for Police Officers: The Nigeria police commission should provide comprehensive human rights training for police officers to educate them on the importance of respecting human rights and dignity.
- d) Justice for Victims: The government must implement the recommendations of the judicial panels by prosecuting identified offenders and compensating victims. This is essential for repairing the trust deficit.
- e) Community Policing: Government should implement localised policing strategies where officers are assigned to specific communities for long periods, fostering familiarity and accountability.

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