Police brutality, #EndSARS protest and looting of covid-19 palliatives at Mazamaza town, Lagos, Nigeria

Waziri Adisa[1], Wakil Asekun [2] Richard Okocha[3] Jubril Jawando[4] Nurudeen Odekoya[5]

[1,3,5]Department of Sociology, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos.

[2]Department of Psychology, University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos

[4]Department of Sociology, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos.

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Abstract

The #EndSARS Protest of October, 2020 has remained a watershed in the history of public protest against police brutality and impunity in Nigeria. The protest, which came during COVID-19 pandemic, brought up many issues which includes poor governance in Nigeria which particularly manifested in poor distribution of COVID-19 palliatives to needyNigerians affected by the pandemics. This study was conducted to investigate the impact of police brutality on the mass action of selected participants. The study adopted a qualitative research to sample a total number of 20 residents of Mazamaza and 2 Senior Police Officers from Agboju and Orile-Iganmu communities. Anchored on General Deterrence Theory and Frustration Aggression Theory, the study found that people engaged in unwholesome looting of COVID-19 palliatives because people were frustrated by Nigerian government handling of the corruption of SARS and the management of COVID-19 relief materials. The study recommends effective police reforms and management of pandemics in Nigeria.

Keywords: Police brutality, #EndSARS Protest, looting, palliatives, Mazamaza, Lagos

1. Introduction

Police brutality and alleged degradation of innocent citizens by some officers of the Nigeria Police Force have been an issue of concern in Nigeria for decades (Amnesty International, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2020; Iwuoha & Aniche, 2022), but the mass protest of October, 2020 appeared to be the climax of public disdain against the perceived brutalization from Nigeria Police Force, particularly the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The October, 2020 protest with hashtag #EndSARS started on 3rdOctober, 2020 after a video surfaced on social media showing the alleged shooting of a man in Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria by some officials of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. This was followed by a mass protest, which started after some people watched the video online and saw how the body of the brutalised man was dumped on the side of the road, while the SARS officials went away with his Lexus SUV car (Ekoh& George, 2021).

SARS is a Special Anti-Robbery Squad established in 1992 under the military to fight armed robbery and organized crimes that were troubling many Nigerian cities, including Lagos. Initially, the force was very effective in combating organized crimes and armed robbery in Nigeria (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, 2021; Ekoh& George, 2021). It also played a significant role in the arrest of Kidnapper Kingpins in Lagos, and the foiling of armed robbery gangs that troubled the city for years.

With time, SARS degenerated into an abusive police unit involving in torture, degrading treatment of citizens and extra judicial killings (Congressional Research Service, 2020). It pursued with vigour the arrest of innocent citizens on trump up charges of being yahoo boys or girls or being in possession of expensive cars. Amnesty International report (2017) on the SARS found that public disenchantment with the Special Anti-Robbery Squad was as a result of decades of human rights abuses in the country.

2. Review of Literature

Police Behaviour, Police Brutality and Citizens' Responses to Police Legitimacy

Empirical research on the impact of police behaviour on citizens' obedience to public order has dominated criminology and social science research in the last three decades, especially since the publication of the work of the American social-psychologist, Tom Tyler, titled "Why Do People Obey the Law" (Bottoms &Tankebe, 2012 ; Johnson, Maguire &Kuhns, 2014; Tankebe, 2010 ; Tyler, 2004). Tyler's initial attempt was to take the issue of police legitimacy beyond the level of Weberian analysis which sees ''legitimacy'' as State legal right to the use of force in maintaining public order (Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012). His idea of police legitimacy provoked the emergence of a new set of research on police conducts in the developed and developing countries.

Most of these studies, unlike the previous ones sought to determine how police legitimacy usually influenced citizens' obedience to law. For instance, in a study of police corruption in Ghana, Tankebe (2012) held that citizens disobey the law because the police are perceived to be inherently corrupt and predatory in their approach to the enforcement of the law. Aborishade (2022) and Adisa, Alabi & Adejoh (2018) studies found that corruption in Nigeria affects public perception and acceptance of police conduct.

COVID-19 Lockdown, Hunger and Youth Protests in Nigeria

Protests by citizens for better living conditions and improved health care delivery were some of the protests that greeted the declaration of lockdown by the Federal Government of Nigeria following the outbreak of the COVID-19 lockdown in February, 2020. In Nigeria, the COVID-19 lockdown came at a time when the Nigerian economy was battered by shrinking revenues with their attendant consequences on government expenditure and its capacity to deliver on its public services. Notwithstanding the foreseen socio-economic implications of the COVID-19 lockdown on the economy, the Nigerian government declared a total lockdown in March, 2020. The President, General Muhammadu Buhari made the pronouncement in a national broadcast to sensitize Nigerians on the need for the lockdown (Mbah, 2020).

Reports have it that the lockdown was part of the measures designed to curb the spread of Coronavirus pandemic (Mbah, 2020) and protect Nigerians from untimely death. The lockdown declared climaxed series of measures implemented by the Federal government to curb the spread of the virus in Nigeria. Such measures include: social distancing, hands washing, use of face mask and fumigation of crowded communities in the country. These measures were implemented and coordinated by the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) and Ministries of Health, at both federal and state levels across the 36 states of the Federation. Mbah (2020) noted that the decision to implement COVID-19 restriction or lockdown was in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organization and the International Community on the pandemic.

Though, countries such as the United States of America, United Kingdom, and France had already declared lockdown and also taken measures to restrict the movement of their citizens. The shock waves of the global health crisis were more apparent in Africa than in any other part of the world. The reason for this was that the health sector in most African countries had been battling abandonment for a long time, which is evident in the continued deterioration of health care infrastructure in the continent. The health sector in Nigeria and in majority of African countries were in a palpable state with limited modern infrastructures, drugs, and manpower to withstand the pandemic, if spiralled beyond the capacity of the government (Amzat, Aminu & Kolo et al, 2020; Mbah, 2020).

As Nigeria began to record an increase in the number of CORONA Virus infections and death, the fear of the Virus was reported to have increased across the country. That was because Nigerians were afraid, if the health sector could withstand the pressure. This fear was heightened in major cities, where human population and probability of infection was high. Lagos and Abuja, being the commercial and administrative headquarters of Nigeria became points of interest. While the pressure was on, the Nigerian government through the National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) continued to keep Nigerians updated about the virus, but that was not enough to allay the fear of many Nigerians about not dying from the virus. As time went on, the impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown bit harder. The first of the two major problems was the challenge of shrinking revenues in the economy following the declaration of the lockdown and associated income losses among Nigerians. The second problem was the burden of paying many workers at

a time, when they have been asked to work from home. Job losses, therefore, became imminent in the face of the shrinking economic resources (Adisa, 2021).

In Nigeria, the combined problems of modernization and phobia for technology slowed down the introduction of ICT into the economy. The e-governance which was introduced during the period of the COVID-19 lockdown, though, brought remarkable changes to the running of public organizations, it resulted into job losses in the private sector (Mbah, 2020). In Lagos, Nigerians expressed their anger in different ways, but the most worrisome of this anger was the emergence of "community bandits" who raided popular streets of Lagos such as Bariga, Surulere, Gbagada, and Mushin and allegedly looted property worth millions of naira (Mbah, 2020). Such violent protest expressed in form of crime by "one million boys" further deepened anger against the Nigerian government. For young Nigerian undergraduates, the COVID-19 lockdown came at a time when the strike by the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) had paralyzed academic activities in Nigeria's public Universities. In year 2020, the strike declared by the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities came at a time when Nigerians were frustrated by poverty and hunger imposed by the COVID-19 lockdown. The reverberating memories of police brutality allegedly perpetrated by some officers of Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) also increased disillusionment among the Nigerian youths (George, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two major theories; General Deterrence Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory of Ted Gurr.

General Deterrence Theory and Law and Order in Nigeria

The General Deterrence Theory holds that citizens will not obey the law if the police and other institutions that are deemed legalized to carry out the job are perceived to be corrupt. Deterrence will only be effective where citizens perceive that the punishment for a crime is severe and will be enforced as at when due. The relevance of the General Deterrence Theory to this study, is that it perceives a situation of protest as a complete breakdown of law in which both the state and the

citizens are guilty of violating the law. The State, in the view of the general deterrence theory, has failed to enforce the law, the way it should be enforced thereby creating a situation of chaos. To deter the citizens from disobeying the law, the State must be seen to be obedient to the law.

Why Do Men Rebel? Gurr's Relative Deprivation Theory, #EndSARS and Looting of COVID-19 Palliatives

Ted Gurr's Relative Deprivation Theory was adopted in this work to explain the combined influence of #EndSARS Protest and COVID-19 lockdown on the looting of COVID-19 palliatives atMazamaza, Lagos. The theory holds that people will protest against political entities, whether government or non-government organizations, when they perceive that they are being unjustly treated. The theory avers that mass protest against injustice and material deprivation will always begin when people perceive that they are unjustly treated and are denied access to basic necessities of life while comparably other people in the same society live in affluence (Balck, 1972; Majeed, 1979).

3. Research Methods and Results

Study Design

The study adopted qualitative research method which is equally a non-experimental method of social science research. The method was adopted because the researchers were particularly interested in the narratives, experiences and observations of those who witnessed the COVID-19 looting at Mazamaza. Qualitative research is a good social research, because it allows the researcher to probe deeply beyond the statistical representation of events. In this regard, In-depth Interview and Key Informant Interviews were adopted in conducting the qualitative assessment of the problem under investigation. For the In-depth Interview, a total of 22 participants were purposively sampled at Mazazama and 2 Key Informant Interviews were conducted in Orile-Ganmu, and Agboju, Lagos, respectively. Orile-Ganmu and Agboju communities were included in the study, in order to serve as a control to Mazamaza community, since they are in the same neighborhoods with the study area.

Study Location

Brief Description of Mazamaza

Mazamaza area of Lagos state is located across Lagos-Badagry Expressway, Amuwo-Odofin, Lagos. Amuwo-Odofin is a Local Government Area in Badagry Division, Lagos State, Nigeria. It is divided into Oriade and Amuwo Local Council Development Area (LCDA) with 7 wards each: Abule-Osun, Agboju, Ibeshe, Irede, Kirikir and Kuje wards constitute Oriade LCDA and Ado-soba, Ekoarete, Ifelodun, Ilado, Tamaro, Irepodun, Odofin and Orire wards comprising Amuwo LCDA. Spreading across the 14 wards are 67 communities, 12 in which are urban, 8 semi-urban and 47 rural settlements. The Monkey Village is one of the rural communities at Mazamaza area of Lagos where the COVID-19 palliatives were stored.

Sampled Population and Sample Size

The sampled population was a group of people who were residents of Mazamaza and Orile-Ganmu as at the time the looting took place in the area. A total of 20 participants comprising 20 residents and traders were interviewed in the study area while the remaining 2 respondents (police officers) of the 22 people included in the study came from Orile-Iganmu and Agboju.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collected for this study were analyzed using ethnographic content analysis. Ethnographic content analysis helps a researcher to report verbatim his or her participants' experiences thereby creating a natural environment in qualitative research and interpretative method. The data for the study were collected in December, 2020 to January, 2021 due to the built-up tensions immediately the #EndSARS protests took place in the study area.

Results

THE EFFICACY OF POLICE BRUTALITY IN LAGOS NIGERIA

The results showed that police brutality is real in Nigeria especially in Lagos where most of the activities of the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad have been perceived as anti-people. One

of the participants interviewed at Mazamaza made this remark about the magnitude of the problem in Lagos, Nigeria.

> Police brutality in Lagos State and Nigeria is a serious problem confronting the citizen in that police harasses people indiscriminately on the road for no just cause. They even go about molesting civilians who are doing their businesses in their immediate environment. The prevalent character displayed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is to perceive every youth as a fraudster (Yahoo yahoo) and then unjustly arrest them without investigation. Most times they are locked up in prison, and they request a large sum of money from their families and friends before they are bailed out (IDI, Female 22, Mazamaza, Lagos, 2021).

PUBLIC ENCOUNTERS AND EXPERIENCE OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND BRUTALITY BY OFFICERS OF THE Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)

Sharing some of the ugly experiences they have had in the hands of officers of the Nigeria Police Force, a 40 year old resident of Mazamaza made this remark about the ugly experience her dad had in the hands of the police:

> My dad was harassed by the disbanded SARS on his way to get what to eat after he returned from work. He was just taking a walk when some police men (SARS) just drove by him and stopped him. They forced him to enter into their vehicle and then took him to their station for questioning. My dad didn't do anything so he told them that he was innocent they interrupted him and then put him in prison for no just cause. He slept in the police cell, and then the following day, my mom came to the station to bail him after paying some amount of money to the police (N20,000 precisely). I believe it's very unfair for the police to harass citizens anyhow simply because they have a gun with them. The government must do something about it so that the

> arrest and harassment of the innocent can be effectively solved **(IDI, Female 40 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).**

Another participant recounted his similar experience with the police in Nigeria:

> There was an encounter I had with the police at Festac close to Union Bank, they stopped me asking me to unlock my phone. I was accused of being a yahoo, but I told them I was not. They searched my phone and my pocket and all they could find is N9,000 on me and I was on my way to the market to buy spare part for my work. The police asked who owns the money with me and I told them it's for me that I was on my way to buy spare part in the market. They then required of me to give them fuel money before they could release me, and I then asked them that is the fuel money for questioning me or for searching and wasting my time? They became very angry, and I told them that I can only spare N500 to give them and one of them was angry and told me that I was mad for suggesting to give them N500 and that I lack respect for the Nigerian police. Then another told his colleague that they should collect the N500 since they didn't find any exhibit with me. They began to drag the whole issue until I finally increased the money to N1,000 before they now released me. The issue of police harassment of citizens in Nigeria is just too embarrassing to the extent that people are threatened to be taken to the police station for no just cause even when you are innocent. I have been harassed by SARS officials at FESTAC multiple times, and once they search me and couldn't find anything they ask for fuel money (IDI, Male, 40 years, Mazamaza, Lagos, 2021).

CAUSES OF THE #ENDSARS PROTEST

The study found that the immediate cause of the #EndSARS Protest was public outrage over the brutality and inhumane treatment by the officers of the Nigeria Police Force working in the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. The protest was believed to have started online after it was discovered that some SARS officials attacked an innocent Nigerian in Delta State.

A 20 year old Barber at Mazamaza had this to say about the cause of the #EndSARS Protest:

> The #EndSARS protest started after the people couldn't bear the brutality coming from the police any longer. They perceived anybody holding a phone or an expensive gadget as a yahoo boy. They harass people at will with the mindset that the victims cannot do anything. Sometimes, they use language like "I will waste you and nothing will happen". The police and SARS are very brutal in their approach to law enforcement in Lagos State and Nigeria at large. The police takes bribes from motorists and passersby at will, and if you complain, they harass you indiscriminately. They collect bribes from drivers of long vehicles like trailers, motorcycle (Okada). The owners or drivers must pay for bail whenever they are seized or confiscated. I believe they extort the masses because of the meager pay they get from the government. However, that is still not a justification for them to take bribe, arrest and harass innocent citizens. Hence, the EndSARS protest was an offshoot of police brutality in Lagos and Nigeria (IDI, Male 20 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

The response of a 35 Male resident of Mazamaza area of Lagos was also not different from what majority of other participants mentioned about the immediate causes of the*#EndSARS Protest:*

> To me, I believe that the EndSARS protest was as a result of bad governance and hunger. Everything is caused by bad governance, because if the government performed their responsibility duly there wouldn't be a protest in the first place and the issue of police brutality would have been addressed long before now. The young people in Nigeria felt that the government has failed them by not protecting them enough from police brutality; hence, they decided to take the law into their hands by engaging in violent protest to show their non-support of the constant brutality and killings of innocent Nigerian youths (IDI, Male, 35 years, Mazamaza, Lagos, 2021).

THE BEGINNING OF THE ENDSARS PROTESTS

Most of the participants at Mazamaza and Orile-Iganmu areas of Lagos State noted that the *#EndSARS Protest did not start as a physical protest. It was in an attempt to attract government attention that degenerated into street protests.*

When one of the participants was asked to narrative how the #EndSARS protest started, he said:

> I don't really know how it all started in this area. All I noticed is that some youths and touts in the area started assembling themselves, carrying placards, singing solidarity songs and protesting on the street peacefully. The location used by the protesters was Saibu Street, Mazamaza. Some shops were closed while others were opened. Business activities weren't grounded in Mazamaza area of Lagos State (IDI, Male, 20 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

Speaking on the process that led to the protest, a male resident of Mazamaza made the following remarks:

> The EndSARS started here after people of Mazamaza saw and heard what was happening in Lekki tollgate in Lagos State. The act was emulated here although it was very peaceful and business activities was not stopped. Few shops were open anyway and people walked on the street freely (IDI, Male 35 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE ENDSARS PROTESTS

On the composition of the people who participated in the #EndSARS protest, majority of the participants stated that they were youths who were mainly dissatisfied with the condition of the country as at that time, including police involvement in extra-judicial killings of young people. They added that Nigerians were at the time of the #EndSARS protest tired of police excesses and wanted government to disband the brutal Special Anti-Robbery Squad.

These positions were echoed in the remark of one of the participants:

> *The participants of the #EndSARS were majorly youths of our community, and they made use of the old Ojoo Road beside Agboju police station, and they protested and made their demands and displeasure against the disbanded SARS and the police. Most of their displeasures were captured in visible placards that they carry on their hands. The protest was generally peaceful in Mazamaza community. There was no media presence in this area during the protest (IDI, Male, 37 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).*

A 20 years old male participant gave a vivid description of the composition of the protesters, as well as the reason for their protest when he said that:

> The Omoonile, hoodlums, touts and some youths were the organizers of the protest. Residents of this area are peace loving people, but if anyone gives us trouble, we will definitely reciprocate trouble to them. Properties and lives were not destroyed during the EndSARS protest in Mazamaza except the casualty that was recorded at Orile area and the death recorded at Monkey Village where we looted the COVID-19 palliatives in Mazamaza (IDI, Male 20 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

WHEN #ENDSARS TURNED VIOLENT

The results showed that the #EndSARS protest was relatively peaceful at Mazamaza at the initial stage of the protest, when similar protests were ongoing at the Lekki Toll-gate, Orile-Iganmu, FESTAC and other parts of Lagos. Sharing similar opinion, a male participant came to this conclusion about the protest;

> Well, the #EndSARS happened in our area after the youth started seeing and hearing how the protest was conducted in other part of Lagos especially in Lekki Toll-gate. The youths in Mazamaza decided to stage their own protest in the area. It was conducted peacefully such that no life was lost. The hoodlums and touts also joined the protest in our community although there were no record of violence and people really conducted themselves well (IDI, Male, 40 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

LOOTING OF COVID-19 PALLIATIVES

The looting of the COVID-19 palliatives was the climax of the October, 2020 #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. A greater number of the participants in the study agreed that there was a relationship between the #EndSARS and the looting of COVID-19 palliatives in Nigeria, particularly at Mazamaza, where the looting was suspected to have started before spreading to other parts of the country. This is reflected in the submission of one of the participants.

> I will say yes because if not for the ENDSARS protest, we wouldn't have known that we have COVID-19 palliatives in our backyard meant for our sustenance but hoarded by the government. That is pure wickedness on the part of the government. There is serious poverty in the country and the least the government should do is to help the conditions of Nigerians and not the other way round. The looting of the COVID-19 palliatives started around 5am at Monkey Village in Mazamaza where the warehouse containing the COVID-19 palliatives in forms of foodstuffs such as rice, garri, Semovita, spaghetti, sugar, salt, indomie and the likes. I was part of the looters.After we were reliably informed by "ABOKI" workers from the warehouse that there was palliative meant for us, so we went in droves to collect our portion. To be sincere, I don't know who busted the warehouse although we leant it was the hoodlums that did that (IDI, Male 20 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

HOW THE LOOTING OF COVID-19 PALLIATIVES TOOK PLACE ATMAZAMAZA PLACE

The participants painted almost similar stories of how the looting took place at Mazamaza, Lagos. They submitted that most people in Lagos were not aware that the government kept some of the palliatives of COVID-19 at Mazamaza, Lagos, and even those who knew about it could not disclose it, because of the security situation of the issue.

> Well, it was a day looting, and people came to loot as far as Ajegunle, Orile and the likes, to take part in the looting of the COVID-19 palliatives before the coming of the Police and Army. The presence of the army didn't stop the looting in any way because the crowd overwhelmed the police and army who were available. In addition, the army were even part of the looters as they were seen filing their vans with foodstuffs before leaving the area. In the course of the looting, three lives were lost to the looting (Two men and a woman).The first woman was stepped on by crowd until she died. The second was electric shock in the warehouse and he died; the third victim was knocked down by a motorcycle while crossing the road with the COVID-19 palliative in his hand (IDI, Female, 22 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

DAYS OF THE COVID-19 LOOTING AND NATURE OF COVID-19 PALLIATIVES LOOTED

The study found that the looting of COVID-19 palliatives took place during the outrage which accompanied the shooting of protesters in Lagos. A 38 year old male respondent gave a vivid account of what transpired on the day of looting of COVID-19 atMazamaza, when he remarked as follows:

> The looting started in the early hours of the morning when we were informed while we were still out to protest that a warehouse at Monkey Village that house the covid-19 palliative has been broken. We all rushed to the scene to see with our own eyes. On getting there, we all noticed that it was true and people were trooping in and out with the COVID-19 palliative which comprises of foodstuffs such as indomie, rice, garri, salt, sugar, sphagetti and the likes. People were so happy looting the foodstuffs, and I also went in there to get my own portion of the national cake (palliative). In fact, those who live nearby the Monkey Village had to come multiple times to loot more of the palliatives. There was free entry and exit for everyone as long as you can make your way through the overwhelming crowd to the warehouse. There was stampede, and as such, the army came to quell the whole situation. Not too long we noticed that the army were also seen looting the COVID-19 palliative, they filled their truck with it, and when they were satisfied, they zoomed off and allowed the rest of the people to continue in the looting. It must be noted that the army were shooting in the air to scare people who intend to go violent while looting the palliative, but they (army) did not stopped the looters from looting the COVID-19 palliative. I was later informed by a friend of mine that it was those that were working (abokis) that leaked the information of the busted warehouse before people started coming to loot. The warehouse was busted by the hoodlums in the guise of #EndSARS protesters after they realized and noticed that the palliative was meant for

> the people as it was visibly displayed not for sale and COVID-19 palliative. **The looting lasted for just a day.** Most of the looters didn't see anything wrong in what they did because we all saw the looting of the palliative as taking what rightfully belong to us. People came from far and near to participate in looting the COVID-19 palliative (IDI, Male, 38 Mazamaza, Lagos).

The result further showed that the looting of COVID-19 palliatives was carried out not only by people from Mazamaza, but also by individuals from neighbouring communities, because it was a day of rage against the State. This position was reiterated by a 40 year oldMazamaza resident:

> The looting took place after some hoodlums in the guise of the #EndSARS protest bundled themselves into the warehouse and started taking the COVID-19 palliatives that were stored at the Monkey Village of Mazamaza. The news of the busted warehouse spread like wildfire such that everyone headed to the warehouse to take their own portion of the COVID-19 palliative because the general idea is that it was meant for them so why was it hidden and why wasn't it distributed to them during the lockdown and why is the government taking too long to do the needful? The warehouse was filled with people who came as far as Badagry, Orile, Ajegunle and the likes to loot the COVID-19 palliative. I was part of the looter, and to my amazement, I noticed that some of the foodstuffs were already getting spoilt, and they were packaged in a bag with COVID-19 palliative inscription on it displaying not for sale. The foodstuffs were: rice, garri, sugar, salt, indomie, spaghetti and the likes. There was a lot of crowd in the warehouse as people were seen busy looting the palliatives in turns, some even came with their immediate and extended family to loot. However, three people died in the course of looting the COVID-19 palliatives, and it was reported that they had taken some foodstuffs earlier and was back for the third time. Of the people that died, one was stepped on to death, another was electrocuted and the third was killed by a moving

> okada while trying to cross the road. The army later graced the warehouse to calm the whole situation; however, they never prevented people from looting in fact they also took part in the looting of the COVID-19 palliatives. The looting was carried out in a day until the whole warehouse was emptied of the COVID-19 palliatives (IDI, Male, 40 years, Mazamaza, Lagos).

CAUSES OF THE LOOTING OF COVID-19 PALLIATIVES

The looting of the COVID-19 palliatives is believed to have been caused by an accumulation of several problems in the country in 2020.

A Male resident of Mazamaza had this to say about the causes of the looting of the COVID-19 palliatives:

> The looting of the COVID-19 palliative was caused by hunger and insincerity on the part of the government. The people were living in abject poverty and could barely feed twice in a day, especially after the outbreak of the covid-19 as well as the horrible lockdown that preceded it. The level of poverty was unimaginable so people saw the looting as an opportunity to stock up their houses with foodstuffs. It's so painful we have heartless government who don't care or feel the pains that the masses are going through. They are only after their selfish interest and that of their immediate families. Hunger and bad governance is the main reason why people looted the COVID-19 palliative, and we see the palliatives as our right so taking it is not a bad idea. However, before the #EndSARS protest, I saw women sharing these foodstuffs among themselves and when they were asked, they said some friend of theirs in government gave it to them. This is very unfair, how can you give palliative to those who are financially comfortable and then neglect the poor in the society? Besides, information reaching us from the workers in the factory is that the palliatives were repackaged and sold in the market by some people government officials

who are in charge of the distribution (IDI, Male 35 years, Mazamaza, Lagps).

4. Discussion

The #EndSARS Protest and the 2020 COVID-19 Lockdown have remained critical junctures in Nigeria's history. The two events occurred at different times in year 2020, but have simultaneously shaped Nigeria's response to a responsible policing. The events which ushered in the crises were the outbreak and declaration of COVID-19 as a global pandemic by the World Health Organizations in late 2019. The Corona Virus is reported to have occurred in China after human contacts with animals (Cohen, 2020). Some reports stated that the virus was a part of a global chemical warfare between the United States of America and China, which escaped at a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

Within few months, the virus had spread to Europe and entered Africa and other parts of the world, thereby spreading fear of global pandemic that was capable of wiping off human populations. In Nigeria, the first contact with the virus was discovered in Lagos, when a Chinese worker who entered Lagos State through Ogun State, was consequently quarantined at Lagos State Infectious Diseases Center. Before you knew it, the virus had spread across the country, and by March of year 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria had declared a total lockdown of the country, in order to avoid contact with the disease. As a follow up to the decision, the Federal Government declared that citizens would have access to palliatives and reliefs through the Federal Government Committee on COVID-19 palliatives and their State Governments. These events were precursors to the popular protests that broke out in October, 2020.

Although the October 2020 #EndSARS protest was believed to have been caused by the excessive mal-treatment of the citizens by the anti-crime unit of the Nigeria Police Force-the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, the mass movement against the police was a collective action against bad governance in Nigeria, including failed promises that sealed the hopes of people after the COVID-19 lockdown.

This study was initiated and conducted in early 2021 immediately after the COVID-19 looting. The study was to determine, if there was a connection between the #EndSARS Protest against police brutality in Nigeria and the looting of COVID-19 palliatives at Mazamaza, Lagos. The study adopted qualitative method of social research focusing on the victims and eye witnesses of the COVID-19 looting. Eye-witness account was adopted, in order to get on the top assessment of the situation rather than proxy measure of the event.

The study found that the #EndSARS Protest was a clarion call to end police brutality in Nigeria, especially by the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)-a unit of the Nigeria Police Force. The protest was believed to have been triggered by the killing of a young man in Delta State by suspected officers of the disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad. Most participants, who spoke with the researchers said that police brutality was a usual occurrence in Lagos, prior to the COVID-19, especially by SARS officials, who harassed young people based on trump up charges. The Police in Lagos, Nigeria was also accused on excessive treatment of innocent citizens, extortion of money from motorists and collection of bribes from citizens who have sought for their services. These findings align with the research of (Aborishade, 2022; Adisa, Alabi&Adejoh, 2018) who differently found the police as a corrupt law enforcement unit in Nigeria.

The study found that #EndSARS Protest took a uniform approach at the initial stage (Adetayo, 2020), but it turned violent when government and security forces began to interrupt the peaceful protests across Lagos and other Nigerian cities such as Abuja, Port-Harcourt, Ibadan, Ilorin etc. At Mazamaza, it was reported that the #EndSARS Protest was very peaceful and non-violent like most parts of Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Areas. Participants noted that protests in neighbouring areas such as Agboju, Orile-Iganmu and FESTAC turned violent on October 20, 2020 when protesters in these areas heard that suspected Nigerian soldiers had shot some protesters at the Lekki Toll-gate, after the protesters refused to comply with the curfew earlier declared by the Lagos State Governor- BabajideSanwan-Olu. This finding corresponded with the earlier reports and research that the violent destruction of property in Lagos was largely caused by reports of police attacks on peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll-gate by security forces (Adisa, 2021; Ekoh & George, 2021).

The study found that the looting of the COVID-19 palliatives was caused more by the frustration experiences of Nigerians in the hands of the Nigerian government during the #EndSARS Protest and the COVID-19 lockdown, which drained and impoverished many families. The lockdown was reported to have made many Nigerians poor and dependent on government for survival. This finding concurs with the Relative Deprivation Theory of Ted Gurr. Gurr's theory which holds that political conflict will occur when people feel that their aspirations have not been achieved while others within the same political system are being treated differently (Black, 1972). The theory is very useful for the study, because it opines that Nigerians during the COVID-19 lockdown were not treated equally. (Agbedo, Thomas-Odia& Diamond, 2020; Dixit, Ogundeji&Onwujekwe, 2020; Olafusi, 2020 ; Mbah, 2020 ;

It also revealed that the looting of COVID-19 at Mazamaza was carried out by different people-hoodlums and residents in the area and those from neighbouring communities of the Monkey village. Participants described the looting as a free for all looting as security forces could not stop people from looting the palliatives. In the process of the looting, many people were injured until Lagos State Government was able to restore normalcy the same day.

The study found that citizens wanted the government to put an end to police brutality, avoid a reoccurrence of the SARS corruption and poor management of Nigerian political economy. Many of the respondents believed that massive destruction of property would not have occurred, if the Nigerian government had treated Nigerians well and protect the State from internal aggression. Police officers interviewed in the course of the study suggested genuine reforms of the police in a way that corruption and corrupt practices the police encounters with the citizens are avoided. These findings aligned with Mbaku (2016) that police reforms in Africa must be a deliberate attempt to uproot corruption, predator policing and end impunity among police officers.

5. Conclusion

This study has been able to demonstrate that the October, 2020 looting of COVID-19 Palliatives was one of the dark days in Nigerian history when young people who were frustrated by excessive use of force by SARS organized a protest that culminated into the #EndSARS protest. It averred that poor governance system that greeted the administration of COVID-19 relief materials also contributed to the violence that erupted during the October, 2020 looting. Based on the research, it is recommended that the Nigerian government should work on the building of a responsive police and responsible government that can effectively manage pandemics.

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APPENDIX I

The pictures below were captured at the Monkey Village of Mazamaza community of Lagos State, Nigeria.





Figure 1: The front gate of the Warehouse where COVID-19 Palliatives was stored at Monkey Village, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Source: IDI, (2021)



Figure 2: The Street leading to the Warehouse at Monkey Village, Mazamaza, Lagos, Nigeria.

Source: IDI 2021



Figure 3: The Street leading to the Warehouse situated at Monkey Village

Source: IDI 2021



Figure 4: Poor Drainage System evidence in Blocked Smelling gutters at Monkey Village, Mazamaza opposite the Warehouse.

Source: IDI 2021


SHOT ON HOT 7
INFINIX DUAL CAMERA



Figure 5: The Monkey Village Neighbourhood where residents are mostly Illiterate Hausa's Motorcycle Riders (Bikes)

Source: IDI 2021

APPENDIX II

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION OF RESPONDENTS OF MAZAMAZA COMMUNITY& AGBOJU, LAGOS WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE INTERVIEW

S/N	SEX	AGE	ETHNICITY	RELIGION	EMPLOYMENT	EDUCATION	COMMUNITY
1.	Female	22	Yoruba	Islam	Student	OND	MAZAMAZA
2.	Male	59	Igbo	Christianity	Business	B.Sc.	MAZAMAZA
3.	Male	20	Igbo	Christianity	Barber	Primary	MAZAMAZA
4.	Male	40	Edo	Christianity	Business	OND	MAZAMAZA
5.	Male	35	Igbo	Christianity	Business	OND	MAZAMAZA
6.	Male	34	Igbo	Christianity	Business	Secondary	MAZAMAZA
7.	Male	32	Yoruba	Islam	Business	Secondary	MAZAMAZA
8.	Male	40	Yoruba	Islam	Artisan	Secondary	MAZAMAZA
9.	Male	31	Igbo	Christianity	Business	Secondary	MAZAMAZA
10	Male	24	Yoruba	Islam	Business	Undergraduate	MAZAMAZA
11	Male	25	Yoruba	Christianity	Trading/Business	OND	MAZAMAZA
12	Male	22	Calabar	Christianity	Artisan	Secondary	MAZAMAZA
13	Female	24	Yoruba	Islam	Trading/Business	B.Sc.	MAZAMAZA
14	Male	19	Calabar	Christianity	Student	Secondary	MAZAMAZA
15	Male	22	Hausa	Islam	Security Guard	Secondary	MAZAMAZA

16.	Male	38	Igbo	Christianity	Business/Transp.	SSCE	MAZAMAZA
17.	Male	59	Igbo	Christianity	Business/Transp.	OND	MAZAMAZA
18.	Male	41	Yoruba	Christianity	Civil Service	B.Sc.	MAZAMAZA
19.	Female	34	Igala	Christianity	Business	OND	MAZAMAZA
20	Female	29	Yoruba	Christianity	Artisan	SSCE	MAZAMAZA
21	Male	34	Yoruba	Christianity	Police	B.Sc.	AGBOJU
22	Male	45	Igbo	Christianity	Police	B.Sc.	OrileIganmu