

Nigerian youth fight back against police terror

written by Bayani
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#EndSars protest in Ikeja, Nigeria, Oct. 9.

Several reports say it started on Oct. 3 with [this tweet](#): an eyewitness report of a young man in Nigeria shot and left for dead by an officer of SARS, who then drove away with the young man's car. Within minutes, the tweet had over 10,000 retweets. The #EndSARS hashtag has been trending worldwide continuously to the publication of this article.

SARS, or the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, is a Nigerian police unit empowered to arrest, extort and murder with impunity. The Nigerian masses, particularly the youth, knew very well that SARS had been responsible for thousands of extrajudicial killings since its inception in 1992. SARS particularly targets young men between the ages of 15 and 35, harassing them for trivial noncrimes like plaiting their hair, having expensive phones or driving nice cars.

That's why thousands of people hit the streets all over Nigeria starting on Oct. 5 calling for the disbanding of SARS and an end to police brutality. The demonstrations and international support — including from [Black celebrities](#) like Beyonce, Naomi Campbell and John Boyega — were so massive that the Nigerian government was forced to dissolve SARS on Oct. 11. This is a historic victory for the Nigerian masses, particularly the youth.

But the protests did not end with this. This massive uprising is about more than just dissolving SARS — it is also about ending police brutality and the economic policies that destroy Nigeria's public sector and deny jobs and liveable wages for Nigerian youth, both of which are largely driven by Nigeria's neocolonial relationship with Europe and the U.S.

Despite the victory, protesters maintain their distrust, citing several occasions when the Nigerian government made similar promises and failed to deliver. Protesters have [demanded a comprehensive review](#) and investigation of the entire police

system and punishment for those who have committed crimes against the people.

Moreover, the Nigerian government announced the formation of a “Special Weapons and Tactics Squad,” or SWAT, which protesters see as a simple rebranding of SARS.

Protesters massacred

On Oct. 20, the Nigerian military was deployed to suppress the protests shortly after the Lagos state government announced a 24-hour curfew. The curfew was also a response to a massive prison break in Benin City.

At Lekki Toll Plaza, where the protests were more like a cultural festival, the military fired live ammunition into the crowd, killing at least 12 protesters. The military then abducted the bodies of those they had shot, leading to confusion about how many had died that day. The Nigerian army has since [denied the shootings](#).

In response, the protests escalated both in number and intensity. Immediately, the crowds burned down the Lekki tollgate, government infrastructure that makes billions of naira (Nigerian currency) in revenue monthly. The Lagos governor’s home was torched and a television network linked to the current ruling party was burned down.

As of Nov. 8, Twitter users posting with the #EndSARS hashtag are reporting that the Nigerian government has not only been disappearing protesters, but also freezing their bank accounts and seizing their passports.

Twitter user Reno Omokri (@renoomokri) points out the hypocrisy: “In 5 years General@MBuhari has been in power, I never read that bank accounts of Boko Haram or their sponsors were frozen, or that their passports were seized. Sadly, in the eyes of Buhari, #EndSARS protesters deserve frozen accounts and seized passports, but terrorists don’t!”

Currently, the movement is calling for the freedom of Eromosele Adene, kidnapped by the Nigerian police after a raid on his home.

Pan-African Community Action and the U.S. Out of Africa Network released a [joint statement](#) highlighting the involvement of Western imperialism in Nigeria, providing a crucial historical context that helps to clarify the conditions that the Nigerian masses face today:

“The police in Nigeria are a colonial institution begun in 1920 by the occupying British Empire. The British Empire used both taxation and the police to fuel a colonial system built on forced labor, which was used to run the colonial government itself and to build the infrastructure it needed to extract revenue from the country as a whole.

“The exploitative role of the police survived Nigerian independence, and has continued until the present day: police have been deployed to raze slums to the ground to clear land for developers to make luxury real estate for the Nigerian middle and upper classes. Nigerian police, like the elites they protect, enjoy total impunity for their actions: more than three out of four Nigerians who have encountered police over the past year report having been extorted for bribes, and sexual assault and extrajudicial killings are also chillingly common. SARS, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, is simply the ‘most notorious’ perpetrator of crimes endemic to policing throughout the country.”

[Link to U.S. anti-racist rebellions](#)

Abayomi Azikiwe, editor of the Pan-African News Wire, [explains the political economy](#) of Nigeria as well as the connection between these uprisings and the anti-racist rebellions in the U.S.:

“Undoubtedly the mass demonstrations against police brutality were influenced by

events in the United States since the police execution of George Floyd on May 25 in Minneapolis. Historically, there has been an intersection between the struggles for civil rights and self-determination among the tens of millions of people of African descent in the West and their allies, where political convergences during the 1950s and 1960s linked the movements against racism in North America with the independence campaigns to end colonialism on the African continent.

“Nigeria is a vast oil-producing state where multinational firms such as Royal Dutch Shell, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Total, among others, are involved with the extraction of petroleum and natural gas resources. Despite its tremendous wealth in energy, the character of the neocolonial system of dependency has deprived the majority of people from benefiting from its advances in the economic sphere.”

If the global working class can lend enough support and solidarity to the Nigerian masses, perhaps these protests can be another step towards genuine peace and self-determination for people of Nigeria.

