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GLOBAL VOICES, LOCAL IMPACT: AN ACCOUNT OF THE NIGERIAN DIASPORA'S ROLE IN THE #ENDSARS MOVEMENT'

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Abstract

This article investigates the Nigerian diaspora's role and impact on the 2020 End SARS movement. Utilizing a transnational framework, the study explores how the diaspora mobilized resources, disseminated information, and exerted pressure on the international community. Building on the legacy of Nigerian diaspora activism, the study explores the motivations, strategies, and limitations of diaspora involvement. Drawing on survey findings covering 44 diaspora members across seven countries and interviews with four grassroots activists in Lagos, the research reveals that diaspora actors supported the movement through digital advocacy, financial contributions, physical protests, and international lobbying. While their efforts significantly amplified global awareness and political pressure, the study also identifies critical challenges, such as waning commitment, financial transparency concerns, and the risk of narrative hijacking. Ultimately, this study offers new insights into the transformative but uneven influence of diaspora engagement in transnational social movements across Africa.

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Keywords: #EndSARS, Nigerian Diaspora, Police Brutality, Protest, Social Media, Transnational Activism

Introduction

In October 2020, a young, unarmed man in Ughelli, Delta State, Nigeria was killed. He lost his life at the hands of those meant to protect him: the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force (Ayandele, 2021; Ekoh and George, 2021). The devastating incident enraged Nigerians and sparked the #EndSARS campaign, which captured national and then global attention. The movement quickly led to the dissolution of SARS and the immediate rejection of the Special Weapons and Tactics Unit (SWAT) that was created to replace it (Ojedokun et al., 2021). #EndSARS was far more than a protest police brutality. It evolved to empower Nigerian youth to demand systemic governance reforms (Ogbonnaya, 2020; Udenze et al., 2024).

While the movement gained international prominence in 2020, its origins trace back to 2017. Spurred by an Amnesty International report documenting SARS abuses, Nigerians launched a campaign to disband the unit. Yet with promises of reform remaining unfulfilled, this initial phase failed to end police brutality. Between January 2017 and May 2020, Amnesty International documented 82 new cases of torture and ill-treatment by SARS (Amnesty International, 2020).

The second #EndSARS movement's ability to better check the actions of the police raises the question as to why it was more successful than the first. Economic hardship caused by fluctuating oil prices, the adverse effects of the COVID-19 lockdown, and a growing sense of collective frustration among Nigerians have all been shown to have played a role the second time around (Tanyi et al., 2022; Udenze 2024). Amidst these factors, an understudied area is the involvement of the country's large diaspora. Considering the millions of Nigerians living abroad yet maintaining close ties to their homeland, it is reasonable to assume that their involvement played a role worthy of investigation. Some publications have made cursory mention the role of the Nigerian diaspora during the movement (Ekwunife et al., 2021; Nnodim and

Sunday-Kanu, 2022; Akanle & Uzieyi 2023), but they all lack detailed analysis.

This research explores the role of the Nigerian diaspora in socio-political mobilizations. In doing so it attempts to expand knowledge of the Nigerian diaspora beyond the predominant focus on its remittances and investments (Hines, 2014; Adebayo and Njoku, 2016; Akanle and Adesina, 2017). Additionally, this research is timely considering the ongoing #EndBadGovernance protests (Salako, 2024). These ongoing demonstrations, borne by the economic hardship under the incumbent administration, serve as another opportunity for the Nigerian diaspora to contribute to the socio-political dynamics of their homeland. Beyond its relevance to Nigeria, this research potentially holds broader relevance to African countries where similar movements such as #ShutdownZimbabwe, #FreeSenegal, and #RejectFinanceBill in Kenya have emerged (Oluwole, 2021; Chinyoka, 2022; Busari et al., 2024). By analyzing the strategies and impact of the Nigerian diaspora during the #EndSARS movement, this case study provides comparative insights into how African diasporas use their networks and resources to support grassroots movements. Ultimately, this research contributes to broader efforts to address governance issues on the continent.

The curiosity explained above leads to the primary question of this article: 'To what extent did the Nigerian diaspora impact and influence the 2020 #EndSARS movement?'. Framed this way, the question is designed to achieve a thorough understanding of the Nigerian diaspora's role in the movement. Supplementary questions that enrich this assessment include examining what factors motivated the Nigerian diaspora to become actively involved in the 2020 #EndSARS movement, and investigating how the Nigerian diaspora mobilized to engage with the movement.

In this article, #EndSARS is taken to be a social movement rather than a riot or isolated protest. While all are forms of collective action and aim to push for systemic reform, social movements differ due to their organization, sustained duration, and shared sense of purpose (Tarrow 2015). In this sense, #EndSARS is best understood as a social

movement rather than a mere protest or uprising because for a specified period of time it combined continuity, collective identity, and strategic mobilization across digital and physical spaces.

Research objectives

To address these questions, this article pursues several complimentary objectives woven through an analysis. First, it traces the historical evolution of Nigerian diaspora activism and examines how previous movements such as NADECO, #OccupyNigeria, and #BringBackOurGirls shaped their engagement in #EndSARS. It then investigates the motivations driving Nigerian diaspora participation in the 2020 #EndSARS movement, including emotional, political, and social factors. This is followed by an examination of the mobilization strategies employed by diaspora actors, including digital activism, financial support, physical protests, and lobbying, and an assessment of the impact of diaspora engagement on the visibility, sustainability, and international framing of the #EndSARS movement. Finally, it critically evaluates the limitations of diaspora involvement from the perspective of Nigerian grassroots activists, including issues of sustainability, accountability, and potential disconnect from grassroots priorities.

Research design and methodology

Comprehending the role of the Nigerian diaspora in the #EndSARS movement requires a methodological approach capable of capturing the complexity of their contributions. To these ends, Akinmade employed semi-structured surveys and in-depth interviews as primary data collection tools. Surveys with written responses were deployed primarily among members of the Nigerian diaspora due to their larger population, while interviews were conducted with Nigeria-based activists to gain their insights on the contributions of the diaspora. This dual approach provided a comprehensive view of how transnational activism intersects with local movements, fostering a balanced analysis of the collective efforts driving the #EndSARS protests.

Over an eight-week period, 44 members of the diaspora participated in the research. They were recruited through a combination of

convenience, purposive, and snowball sampling. Participants represented a geographically diverse cohort, engaging from the following countries: Canada, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, United Kingdom, United States, and South Africa. Gender representation was relatively balanced, with 21 participants identifying as male, 22 as female, and one as non-binary. In terms of age groups, most of the respondents were spread out between the 25-34 and 45-54 age group, 19 and 12 participants respectively. The least represented age group, with only one participant, were those aged 65+. Despite efforts to strengthen the diaspora participant pool, there were still some challenges with participant selection. Firstly, the religious diversity of Nigeria, a country relatively split in half between Christianity and Islam (McKinnon, 2021), was not fully reflected in the sample size. Only two informants identified as Muslim, while the rest identified as Christians. Additionally, the diaspora respondents were also disproportionately first-generation immigrants (89%).

On the side of grassroots activists, four individuals/organizations participated in the research. They represented a relatively diverse range of roles and expertise. These participants included a legal and advocacy organization, a professional caterer who provided food and drinks for protesters, a medical professional who treated injured victims, and a member of a women's advocacy organization in Nigeria. Though their diverse forms of activism, it is important to note that all four activists were based within Lagos State, a major hub for the protests. Although Akinmade contacted and was acknowledged by other organizations elsewhere in the country, he only heard back from the four noted.

The research project underwent ethical approval at the University of Edinburgh, and was approved. Throughout the process, ethical considerations were prioritized by including anonymized participation and sharing resources to address potential trauma, particularly for those recounting experiences of police brutality or repression.

Akinmade's positionality as a researcher played a significant role in shaping the study. As a first-generation Nigerian American, he

recognizes the potential influence of a Western upbringing on how the data is interpreted and local activists are engaged with. To help mitigate biases, Akinmade adopted a posture of humility, openly communicated the academic purpose of the study, and refrained from imposing assumptions onto participants. While he did not actively participate in the #EndSARS movement, he addressed this transparently in the field research, acknowledging any limitations this might bring to the analysis. Reflexivity and participant feedback was then fed into the research process, with the aim to ensure a balanced, respectful, and impactful examination of the diaspora's contributions to one of Nigeria's most significant social movements.

Part One: Historical trajectories and the awakening of 2020

Nigerian diaspora activism: Historical context and scholarly landscape

The involvement of the Nigerian diaspora in the #EndSARS movement did not emerge in a vacuum; it is part of a long history of socio-political activism that has shaped Nigeria's struggle for justice and governance reform. Existing scholarship on Nigerian diaspora activism has documented sustained patterns of political engagement, yet critical gaps remain in understanding how diasporas influence contemporary movements. Early studies focused on diaspora activism during the colonial period, when educated Nigerians living abroad became vocal advocates for independence (Olabode, 2016). More recent scholarship has examined diaspora political engagement during specific crises, such as the Abacha dictatorship (Shettima, 1999; Akinrinade and Ogen, 2011) and the emergence of digital activism in movements such as #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOurGirls (Olabode, 2016; Uwalaka and Watkins, 2018; Onah, 2024).

However, existing literature on Nigerian diaspora activism exhibits three significant limitations that justify this research. First, while scholars have documented historical patterns of diaspora engagement (Olabode, 2016; Wapmuk et al., 2014; Pérouse de Montclos, 2005), they have primarily focused on earlier periods or analysed diaspora contributions as secondary factors rather than central objects of inquiry. Second, publications that mention the diaspora's role during

#EndSARS (Ekwunife et al., 2021; Nnodim and Sunday-Kanu, 2022; Akanle & Uziewi, 2023) provide only cursory treatment, lacking the detailed empirical analysis necessary to understand the specific mechanisms, motivations, and impacts of diaspora involvement in this movement. Third, and most critically, no existing study provides a comprehensive account of both what happened and what did not happen during diaspora engagement with #EndSARS. This article attempts to respond to all three gaps while also documenting not only the contributions of Nigeria's diaspora but also their contradictions.

From NADECO to #BringBackOur Girls

Activism among the diaspora can be traced back to the colonial era when educated Nigerians living abroad became vocal advocates for independence (Olabode, 2016). However, the period between 1993 and 1999 stands out as particularly significant in establishing modern patterns of diaspora political engagement. These six years were marked by the military dictatorship of the late General Sani Abacha, under whose rule Nigeria was characterized by severe economic hardship, widespread suppression of civil liberties, and terrible human rights violations (Shettima, 1999; Akinrinade and Ogen, 2011; Wapmuk et al., 2014).

Many Nigerians who opposed the incumbent administration were forced to flee. These exiled activists, along with other Nigerians abroad who had previously migrated for economic or vocational reasons, formed the backbone of the diaspora's political engagement during the Abacha years. Despite being geographically removed, these activists maintained strong ties to home and engaged in socio-political advocacy through traditional methods such as open letters, newspaper articles, and public forums (Olabode, 2016).

A notable achievement of these activists was the establishment of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) in 1994. The Washington D.C.-based organization composed of veteran opposition figures such as Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, Anthony Enahoro, and current Nigerian president, Bola Tinubu (Pérouse de Montclos, 2005; Olabode, 2016). NADECO operated both within Nigeria and abroad. It established a

radio station, Radio Kudirat (later renamed Radio NADECO), which broadcasted short-wave programmes criticizing the government (Olukotun, 2002; Olabode, 2016). This media outlet became an essential tool for mobilizing opposition and providing alternative narratives to the government-controlled media. Alongside other factors including the death of General Abacha, the efforts of NADECO and other diaspora activists helped ensure that Nigeria had transitioned into a new democracy by the start of the twenty-first century. This period demonstrated the potential of the Nigerian diaspora to influence political change in their homeland.

The democratic transition in Nigeria in 1999 ushered in a new era of diaspora activism. While the optimism of this time initially inspired hopes for reform, the failure of successive governments to address systemic issues reignited dissent both at home and abroad. This period coincided with the rise of the internet and social media, which transformed the landscape of activism. A case in point is the '#OccupyNigeria' protests of 2012. Sparked by the removal of the oil subsidies, a policy that disproportionately affected Nigeria's lower and middle classes, diaspora members coordinated with activists at home to amplify the movement across multiple diasporic locations (Olabode, 2016). Using platforms such as Facebook and 'X' (formerly 'Twitter'), they bypassed traditional media to directly engage global audiences (Uwalaka and Watkins, 2018).

Building on the momentum of #OccupyNigeria, two years later the diaspora played a pivotal role in the 2014 '#BringBackOurGirls' campaign. Triggered by the abduction of 276 schoolgirls by the Islamist jihadist Boko Haram organisation, the campaign further illustrated the diaspora's commitment to amplifying local struggles on a global scale. Initially led by local activists, the campaign quickly gained international traction, partly due to the active involvement of the Nigerian diaspora (Onah, 2014; Olabode, 2016). Through social media, they brought the crisis to the attention of celebrities, political leaders, and ordinary citizens worldwide, making the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls a viral phenomenon (Onah, 2024). The global attention placed significant pressure on the Nigerian government to commit to rescuing the girls.

This demonstrated the power of coordinated diaspora efforts in forcing the government's hand.

These movements, NADECO, #OccupyNigeria, and #BringBackOurGirls, established both a legacy and a playbook of diaspora activism that would prove crucial when #EndSARS emerged in 2020. However, what existing scholarship has not adequately examined is how these historical patterns manifested in #EndSARS, what was continuous and what was novel, and critically, what the limitations and contradictions of diaspora involvement were.

2017: The movement that wasn't

As mentioned in the introduction, the 2020 #EndSARS movement was not the first of its kind. It was a resurgence of the 2017 public outcry against police brutality in Nigeria (Dambo et al., 2020; Ekwunife et al., 2021). The 2017 campaign differed significantly from its 2020 counterpart in terms of its scope. It remained largely local within Nigeria and failed to capture substantial diaspora attention. Of the 44 diaspora informants for this research, fewer than 10% were aware of the original movement. Among this small group, just one respondent reported actively being engaged in the movement as defined in the methodology section. This individual organized protests at the Nigerian High Commission in Pretoria (Informant 23). While this isolated protest garnered significant support among the Nigerian diaspora in South Africa, it was an anomaly. In 2017, many diaspora members remained passive or uninvolved.

The limited involvement of the Nigerian diaspora during the 2017 campaign is itself significant. It indicates that diaspora mobilization is not an automatic response to injustice, even in cases involving police brutality and human rights abuses. The relatively muted reaction in 2017 suggests that certain catalysts and contextual factors need to align before concern turns into collective action. Understanding what was absent in 2017 helps highlight what was present in 2020.

2020: A perfect marriage of motivation and mobilization

By contrast, the 2020 movement witnessed a dramatic increase in diaspora awareness and participation. All participants reported being aware of this second wave of protests, and half actively participated. This marked increase in both awareness and active engagement confirms the initial assumption that the Nigerian diaspora was indeed more involved in the 2020 movement compared to its 2017 iteration. But what changed? What motivations transformed the diaspora from observers to active participants?

The primary motivation for the Nigerian diaspora's participation in the 2020 #EndSARS movement was their frustration with Nigeria's persistent governance failures and the deep desire for systemic change. Despite the country's abundant natural resources and immense human potential, Nigeria has long struggled with corruption, economic mismanagement, and widespread human rights abuses (Fagbadebo, 2007; Omoyibo, 2013). These issues largely stem from a leadership culture that prioritizes personal gain over national development (Fagbadebo, 2007; Omoyibo, 2013). This ongoing failure to address fundamental issues has created consistent disappointment both within Nigeria and among its diaspora. As one respondent laments, "We have always had terrible leaders in Nigeria and corruption has always been at an all-time high. Rights of the masses are trampled upon, and people are treated worse than trash" (Informant 34). Another respondent linked their participation to "bad governance, crumbling economy, poverty, injustice, hunger, suffering" (Informant 5), personally connecting to the movement. This shared frustration within the diaspora became a rallying cry to challenge Nigeria's longstanding political and social issues. The #EndSARS movement represented an opportunity to address these root causes, prompting many diaspora members to see it as a pivotal moment in the country's history. They viewed it as a chance to "take power back as a people" (Informant 9) and confront "institutionalized oppression by state instruments and agencies" (Informant 38). This sense of urgency and the need to participate made their involvement not just desirable, but essential.

For the diaspora, the movement was intrinsically linked to a vision of a better future for Nigeria, one where they and their families could safely engage with the country. This desire for change was particularly prominent among younger diaspora members who had left Nigeria early and had a more detached relationship with their homeland. For these individuals, the Nigeria described by their parents felt distant and almost mythical. The collective action of Nigerian youth during the protests rekindled their connection to the country and inspired them to act, even from abroad. For those who had experienced Nigeria firsthand, such as those who attended primary school there, the movement had an even deeper resonance. As one person put it, it evoked childhood memories of the nursery rhyme “Parents listen to your children. We are the leaders of tomorrow. Try to pay our school fees and give us a sound education” (Informant 22), symbolizing the promise of a better future that the movement seemed to bring back to life. This alignment of past aspirations with present action reinforces the diaspora’s commitment to the cause, turning distant hopes into tangible possibilities.

Personal experiences and connection to police brutality

The diaspora’s engagement with the #EndSARS movement was also deeply influenced by their personal experiences with police brutality in Nigeria.

As one participant emotionally wrote:

“I was distraught by the killings and the mistruths being spread by the Govt agencies. I grew up in Nigeria, so we all knew how bad the police have always been. Seeing it escalate to involve killing innocent citizens and involving the Army made us rise up to defend the human rights of our people. It also shed light on the importance of reform in the political structure of the country as the citizens continue to suffer at the hands of the current crop of leaders” (Informant 16).

This sentiment was echoed across the community, particularly among younger members who had experienced SARS profiling (Informants 25, 27, and 33). These individuals could relate to the targeting based on age, appearance, or socio-economic status, with some recounting multiple unwarranted arrests. One participant in the U.S. shared that after moving back to Nigeria, they were arrested five times without cause in a year. Others spoke of extortion and mistreatment by police. Another put it this way: “I have been a victim of casual cruelty and extortion by security agents in Nigeria. It was not hard to want to get involved” (Informant 27). The lasting impact of these experiences reinforced the diaspora’s determination to confront Nigeria’s systemic law enforcement issues and support the movement for change.

Sense of solidarity

A further incentive for the diaspora to become involved in the #EndSARS movement was their strong sense of empathy and solidarity with those still residing in Nigeria. This emotional rationale was often based on having family and friends still in the country. As a respondent shared:

“My parents and little brother still lived back home in Nigeria, so in a way, I was affected because I would always ask: ‘what if?’. *What if* it was my mother or my father that became victims? *What if* I got a call that my baby brother was killed by the very hands that swore to protect us?” (Informant 16).

The “what if” sentiment of helplessness encapsulates the constant state of anxiety experienced by diaspora members about the safety of their loved ones in Nigeria. It was a scenario which haunts a few other participants (Informants 8, 19, 31 and 37). Although members of the diaspora were not physically present in Nigeria, they were still affected emotionally. Grappling with this psychological toll, the least that many of the diaspora felt they could do was show solidarity with the movement. This sense of empathy extended beyond immediate family relationships to encompass all Nigerians (Informant 34). This expansive

solidarity demonstrates the broader sense of national identity and shared struggle.

Inspiration from global movements

The #EndSARS movement resonated profoundly with the Nigerian diaspora, particularly due to its similarities with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement which had erupted and gained momentum a few months prior. The BLM movement, ignited by the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, served as an important catalyst in galvanizing the Nigerian diaspora. This global phenomenon heightened the diaspora's awareness of systemic police oppression elsewhere and provided a framework through which they interpreted events unfolding in Nigeria. The increased consciousness fostered by BLM created a compelling rationale for engagement, particularly for those born in the 'Global North' and who had never visited Nigeria. These individuals drew striking parallels between the racial discrimination they faced in their countries of residence and the experiences of young Nigerians. They recognized similarities in the age and class-based discrimination that young Nigerians suffered at the hands of the police (Informants 7 and 8, two young Nigerian Americans; Baker, 2020). Even for members of the diaspora who had never visited Nigeria at any point in their life, the ability to make this connection created a unique emotional investment in the cause.

Confluence

The shift from the muted diaspora response in 2017 to the widespread mobilization of 2020 reflects the convergence of several factors. While many of these issues noted above such as poor governance and police abuse had always been present, what changed in 2020 was the confluence and global context of these elements. The COVID-19 pandemic had heightened economic and government failures. The BLM movement had created the framework to link local injustice to a global struggle against police brutality. Social media had become more sophisticated for organizing. Most importantly, a new generation of Nigerians at home had built a movement with clarity that captured the imagination of the diaspora. Understanding these historical and

motivational shifts helps explain not only why the diaspora mobilized but also set the stage for understanding how they acted. The next section explores the mechanisms through which the engagement unfolded.

Part Two: Mobilization across borders: Strategies of the diaspora

Having discussed *why* the Nigerian diaspora mobilized, we now turn to *how* they mobilized to support the movement. The Nigerian diaspora's engagement with the #EndSARS movement operated through four interconnected mechanisms. Rather than isolated mechanisms, these strategies function interconnectedly. Digital activism drove physical protests, while physical protests generated content for digital platforms. Both required and justified financial support, and all three informed lobbying efforts. Understanding how these mechanisms worked individually and collectively reveals the sophistication of diaspora mobilization and its capacity to exert pressure on the Nigerian government from multiple angles at once.

Digital activism

Much like the #OccupyNigeria and #BringBackOur Girls campaigns, the Nigerian diaspora's support of the #EndSARS movement in 2020 was primarily facilitated by their effective use of social media. More than 90% of participants who actively supported the movement indicated that digital media was their primary mode of engagement. The diaspora leveraged a wide range of platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, WhatsApp, X and YouTube. This multi-platform approach was a deliberate strategy to ensure the movement's message reached various demographic and professional audiences across the globe (Informants 5, 15, and 31). By using multiple platforms, they could tailor their content to maximize reach and impact, ensuring that the movement resonated within different spaces.

Recognizing the unique characteristics of each platform, the diaspora adopted platform-specific tactics to amplify their engagement. On X, for example, they strategically retweeted, liked, and replied to tweets related to #EndSARS, aiming to boost the movement's visibility by

influencing the platform's algorithm. On TikTok, they shared short, interactive videos highlighting the movement, often set to songs that became symbolic of the protests. LinkedIn was used for more detailed posts about police brutality and the objectives of the movement, enabling a deeper, professional-level discussion. The success of these strategies was evident as #EndSARS became a trending topic globally, with approximately 28 million tweets across multiple countries, including Canada, Germany, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Malefakis, 2021; Bello et al., 2023). This multi-faceted approach demonstrated the diaspora's understanding of how to leverage each platform effectively.

The diaspora's social media efforts went beyond information dissemination; they used their platforms to share personal stories of police brutality. One respondent recounted their experiences with SARS officers, including four separate incidents of mistreatment in Nigeria (Informant 16). These personal narratives humanized the issue and created a stronger emotional connection with international audiences. Stories like these were compiled and shared on platforms like ENDSARS.com, which served as a repository for firsthand accounts of police brutality. This storytelling not only amplified the movement's message but also made the struggles faced by Nigerians more relatable to a global audience.

In addition to sharing personal experiences, the diaspora actively sought international celebrity support to further raise awareness. Frustrated by the perceived silence of global figures who profited from African culture, diaspora members initiated campaigns on social media to encourage celebrities to speak out. Their efforts successfully garnered endorsements from high-profile figures such as Beyoncé, Chance the Rapper, Kanye West, Marcus Rashford, Rihanna and Viola Davis. Beyoncé's support went beyond words; she collaborated with youth organizations to provide emergency healthcare, food, and shelter to protesters (O'Malley, 2020). This engagement with celebrities helped amplify the movement's visibility on a global scale, showing the diaspora's ingenuity in using celebrity activism to increase the movement's resonance.

Physical demonstrations

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nigerian diaspora mobilized to support the #EndSARS movement through physical demonstrations. While concerns about contracting the virus and its long-term effects on both them and their loved ones were prevalent, almost half of the active participants still engaged in protests. Demonstrations occurred in major cities such as Birmingham, Johannesburg, London, New York, Toronto and Washington D.C., among others. To organize these events, the diaspora employed a mix of more conventional communication methods such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups and X to coordinate logistics, share safety information, and adapt to changing health circumstances. Additionally, they used newer platforms such as Clubhouse to host real-time discussions and strategy sessions, enhancing their ability to respond to the situation dynamically (Informants 16, 23, 43, and 44).

The diaspora also demonstrated tactical expertise by organizing protests in front of diplomatic missions, aiming to attract media attention and raise international awareness of Nigeria's situation. In South Africa, protests in front of the Nigerian Consulate in Johannesburg were broadcast by local outlets like EyeWitness News South Africa (Informant 43). Additionally, the diaspora organized candlelight vigils to honour those lost during the protests, particularly after the October 2020 massacre at Lekki Toll Gate, where Nigerian security forces opened fire on and killed peaceful #EndSARS protesters. Vigils, such as those in London's Trafalgar Square, served to humanize the issue and create deeper connections between the diaspora, Nigerians at home, and other global citizens, reinforcing the movement's emotional and collective significance.

Financial contributions

Financial support helped form the backbone of the diaspora's efforts to sustain the #EndSARS movement. Around a quarter of respondents who actively supported the movement noted using this form of diaspora mobilization. The diaspora directed their funds towards key

organizations and individuals in Nigeria, with one of the most significant beneficiaries being the Feminist Coalition (Fem Co). Initially focused on advocating for women's equality, Fem Co became a prominent player in the #EndSARS movement. Recognizing their leadership, the diaspora concentrated financial support on Fem Co, including targeted fundraisers by groups such as fraternities (Informant 18). This support helped Fem Co raise approximately 150 million naira (around \$392,000) between November 2020 and March 2021, bolstering the movement's core objectives (Feminist Coalition, 2021; Oanda, 2021).

In addition to supporting established organizations such as Fem Co, the diaspora also extended financial aid to grassroots activists and individuals involved in the protests. Funds were directed to essential services such as food, medical care, and transportation for protesters, ensuring that resources reached various levels of the movement. This decentralized distribution of funds allowed smaller grassroots efforts to benefit directly, which might not have been the case had the funds been only channelled through larger organizations. Despite the challenges posed by personal financial constraints such as student loans or business difficulties, many diaspora members still contributed what they could, understanding the critical role of financial resources in sustaining the movement. They strategically allocated their funds to maximize impact, demonstrating the diaspora's commitment to the cause even amidst individual economic limitations.

Lobbying

The Nigerian diaspora utilized lobbying as a form of activism during the #EndSARS movement, albeit less extensively than the other methods discussed. Only three respondents (Informants 7, 25 and 34) reported participating in lobbying efforts. Diaspora members in the United Kingdom and the United States contacted their elected representatives through emails, letters, and phone calls. They urged officials to condemn the Nigerian government's actions and support the protesters' demands. This approach was successful as two of the three participants who used this tactic noted hearing back from their

representatives. The diaspora community also signed and shared. Petitions circulated on change.org accumulated approximately 153,000 signatures (Change.org, 2020a; Change.org, 2020b; Ogobuegwu, 2020). While not as widely adopted as other tactics, lobbying allowed the Nigerian diaspora to harness their positions in host countries. This approach aimed to draw attention to the movement and potentially influence international responses to the situation in Nigeria. Even though this approach was not as widely adopted as other tactics, lobbying allowed the Nigerian diaspora to draw attention to the movement and potentially influence international responses to the situation in Nigeria.

The aforementioned mechanisms created multiple pressure points that the Nigerian government could not easily suppress. They reinforced one another in ways that increased their individual impacts. Understanding how these mechanisms worked individually and collectively illuminates both the strengths and complexities of diaspora engagement. The diaspora demonstrated remarkable capacity for rapid mobilization and strategic adaptation. Yet as we shall see, these same mechanisms also generated tensions, limitations, and contradictions that complicated the diaspora's impact on #EndSARS.

Part III: Critical assessment of impact and its limits

Assessing the Nigerian diaspora's impact on #EndSARS requires moving beyond simple success/failure binaries to examine the tensions that characterized their involvement. The diaspora simultaneously amplified and complicated the movement, provided resources while raising accountability concerns, and demonstrated both commitment and fragility.

Positive impacts of the Nigerian diaspora on the 2020 #EndSARS movement

The Nigerian diaspora played a pivotal role in amplifying the 2020 #EndSARS movement, using global mobilization strategies that significantly impacted local efforts in Nigeria. All four Nigeria-based grassroots activists interviewed expressed favourable views on the

diaspora's contributions to elevating the movement's profile internationally (Informants 45, 46, 47, and 48). According to Informant 48, a member of a women's advocacy organization in Nigeria, "The relentless effort of the Nigerian diaspora to elevate the #EndSARS movement to a global platform truly impressed me. Thanks to their involvement, our voices were finally heard." This sentiment underscores how the diaspora's engagement brought visibility and validation to the work of local activists, emboldening their advocacy and pressuring the Nigerian government to respond.

The diaspora's ability to draw international attention was especially critical during events such as the Toll Gate Massacre in Lagos. While the Nigerian government attempted to suppress information about the deadly shooting, the diaspora acted as a crucial outlet for disseminating truthful accounts. For example, Informant 47, a doctor who treated victims, shared these stories with family and friends abroad who used their platforms to broadcast the information widely. This strategy shielded local activists from direct government retaliation while drawing the attention of global media outlets, including CNN. As Informant 46, a professional caterer who supported protesters, observed, "...even CNN was talking about it, and at the end of the day, they released a documentary about it" (CNN, 2020). In a country known for banning social media to stifle dissent (Anyim, 2021), the diaspora's involvement not only protected activists but also exposed government abuses on an international stage.

The global attention generated by the diaspora extended beyond media coverage, influencing diplomatic and legal actions. Demonstrations at diplomatic missions worldwide, as noted earlier on, prompted foreign governments and organizations to act. For example, the Parliament of the United Kingdom's House of Commons debated the movement, passing a motion condemning the Nigerian government's actions and urging adherence to international human rights standards (Nwosu, 2020). Inspired by this momentum, a Nigerian legal organization filed a petition with the International Criminal Court (ICC), which, unlike past petitions, received an acknowledgment and a commitment to monitor proceedings in Nigeria. Informants noted that

such a response would have been unimaginable without the diaspora's work in amplifying the movement and pressuring international bodies to act.

By leveraging global platforms and diplomatic channels, the Nigerian diaspora provided a protective buffer for local activists and ensured international scrutiny of the Nigerian government's actions. Their efforts not only validated and amplified local voices but also created tangible shifts in global awareness and accountability, demonstrating the transformative potential of diaspora-led advocacy.

Financial impact

The financial contributions of the Nigerian diaspora significantly bolstered the resilience of the #EndSARS movement, according to grassroots activists. Three out of four activists emphasized how diaspora funds addressed critical needs, ensuring the sustainability of the protests. These contributions supported medical expenses for injured protesters, particularly after violent events like the Toll Gate Massacre, which caused fatalities and widespread injuries (Ayandele, 2021). Additionally, diaspora funding provided essential food and water for protesters, alleviating basic survival concerns and enabling greater focus on the protests. Informant 46 noted that this assistance allowed participants to dedicate themselves fully to the movement rather than worrying about "hustling for their daily [N]2K" (\$1.00), a satirical reference to minimum daily survival needs in Nigeria. Furthermore, diaspora funds facilitated logistical support, including transportation for protesters, which helped mobilize and sustain large-scale demonstrations.

The financial impact of the diaspora became even more crucial when the Nigerian government froze the accounts of key organizer, Fem Co (Sahara Reporters, 2020; Ayandele, 2021). This action threatened to derail the movement, but the diaspora adapted swiftly by shifting to cryptocurrency transfers. This innovative approach enabled secure, anonymous, and efficient funding, bypassing traditional financial institutions vulnerable to government interference. By leveraging alternative financial systems, the diaspora ensured that the

movement's logistical and operational needs were met, demonstrating remarkable resourcefulness and solidarity in the face of governmental suppression.

Underappreciated impact of moral support

Apart from the tangible forms of support noted above, the diaspora provided important moral support. Although not mentioned by any of the diaspora members who participated in the survey, this support was greatly valued by local activists. This support was manifested through frequent calls and emails of solidarity from diaspora members. These gestures of encouragement offered more than emotional comfort. They also provided vital validation to the activists. As Informant 45 noted, these messages reassured them that they were "impacting the lives of millions of people." This combination of practical assistance and emotional encouragement played a crucial role in sustaining and amplifying the movement from the perspective of those on the ground in Nigeria.

Limitations of the diaspora's impact

Notwithstanding the significant impact of the Nigerian diaspora on the #EndSARS movement, it was not without some contradictions that affected its overall effectiveness.

Short-term enthusiasm without long-term commitment

The primary limitation of the diaspora's involvement in the #EndSARS movement was its lack of sustainable commitment. Four years on, out of 22 diaspora members who initially reported active engagement, eight stated they no longer support the movement. Of those who claimed initially actively supporting the movement, many have retreated to 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism', forms of low-effort, social media-based participation that, while easy to perform, often lack meaningful impact (George and Leidner, 2019). This transition from active, potentially influential involvement to passive online engagement underscores a critical weakness in the diaspora's long-term commitment.

The waning support stems from a misguided perception. Some members of the diaspora believe the movement has achieved its goals (e.g. Informants 8, 15, 24, and 43). This notion was vehemently pushed back on by all the Nigeria-based grassroots activists. Despite the formal disbandment of SARS and the rejection of its alternative SWAT, the movement's five core objectives as stated in the introduction to this research have not been met (Informants 45, 46, 47, and 48; Ecoma, 2023). Many protesters continue to be detained despite government promises of release. Several states have failed to establish judicial panels to investigate police brutality and compensate victims. In states where panels were formed, most recommendations have not been implemented. Furthermore, disbanded officers have been redeployed without psychological evaluation, and police salaries remain stagnant. These unresolved issues lead local activists to question the evolution of the Nigerian diaspora's involvement and commitment to the cause.

Other diaspora members cited frustration and feelings of helplessness in the face of government repression as reasons for their diminished involvement (e.g. Informants 5, 16,19, and 24). They reference the Toll Gate massacre as a turning point in the intensity of their engagement with the movement. While understandable, local activists argue that this reaction does evoke some hypocrisy (Informant 47). They note that informants can return to their livelihoods without still advocating for those in Nigeria who continue to suffer from police brutality and inept governance. They further state that the waning support from the diaspora could have contributed to the movement's inability to maintain pressure on the Nigerian government to enact meaningful reform beyond police brutality.

Limited engagement with the movement

A further limitation of the impact of the Nigerian diaspora in the 2020 #EndSARS movement was the sizeable number of those individuals who abstained from actively engaging with the movement. Although this point was not mentioned by any of the local activists, it needs to be discussed as it has the potential to have weakened the diaspora's impact on the movement. As mentioned, for various reasons, about

half of the Nigerian diaspora covered in this study chose not to get involved with the movement.

One of the main reasons cited for not engaging with the movement was a lack of confidence in it, based on the limited success of previous forms of protests. Of the surveyed participants, Informant 23 was the only respondent to have actively engaged with the 2017 #EndSARS movement. In the 2020 movement, however, the same informant refrained from supporting the movement in any capacity. In fact, they urged other Nigerians in the South African diaspora to participate because the 2017 movement alongside other social movements targeting change in Nigeria had failed to yield any substantial reforms. This feeling of resignation was further substantiated by other members of the diaspora who believed that the movement would only lead to bloodshed and not any meaningful change (Informants 2 and 32). Apart from scepticism, other reasons provided for not participating centred on logistical constraints, and a sense of disconnect from the situation in Nigeria.

Issues with financial transparency

The issue of financial transparency and accountability emerged as a significant concern regarding the diaspora's involvement in the #EndSARS movement. Despite the substantial financial contributions made by the diaspora, questions arose about the mechanisms for tracking and distributing these funds. As one participant observed, "Some account numbers were put up by those from the diaspora, but no one in the diaspora verified these accounts or if they actually reached their intended targets" (Informant 47). This lack of due diligence in verifying fund recipients created a potential vulnerability in the diaspora's mobilization system. It left room for exploitation or misdirection of resources. Allegations of misappropriation of funds were not only levelled at members of the diaspora but at grassroots organizations in Nigeria. Fem Co, for example, was accused of not accounting for a substantial sum of funds, despite presenting an audit report (Kabir, 2024). Although this was not the diaspora's fault, an

activist based in Nigeria (Informant 47) felt it was the responsibility of the diaspora to verify where the funds raised were headed.

Threat of hijacking the movement

Although not a limitation, there was also concern of the potential for the diaspora to inadvertently hijack or overshadow the grassroots nature of the movement. Informant 48 cautioned against the narrative that the diaspora was primarily responsible for the visibility of the movement. They noted that the movement was primarily visible due to the work of local activists who were at the frontline of the movement. This opinion illustrates the importance of ensuring that the diaspora support remains accountable to and guided by the needs of local organizers, rather than imposing external agendas or taking control of the narrative. The goal should be to amplify domestic voices, not replace them.

Conclusion

The Nigerian diaspora played a vital role in the #EndSARS movement, but their impact was limited by challenges in sustainability, engagement, and financial transparency. The lessons from #EndSARS should not be interpreted as a blueprint for orchestrating future protests, but rather as insights into how diaspora engagement can be strengthened when spontaneous movements inevitably emerge within developing democracies. Rather than planning toward specific political activities, the focus should be on building the capacity and structures that enable more effective diaspora response when citizens mobilize around governance failures. This includes establishing clearer mechanisms for financial accountability, developing sustainable networks for information sharing, and maintaining diplomatic relationships that can be activated during periods of political crisis.

Theoretically, this research advances understanding of diaspora political actors as occupying a unique transnational space that simultaneously connects and complicates domestic political struggles. The Nigerian diaspora during #EndSARS functioned neither as purely external actors nor as direct participants in domestic politics. Rather

they functioned as hybrid agents who leveraged their positionality across multiple political contexts to amplify local movements, mobilize international pressure, and provide material support. This positioning enables diasporas to serve as critical intermediaries between domestic civil society and the international community, translating local grievances into global concerns while channelling external resources and attention back to grassroots efforts. However, this same hybridity also generates tensions around legitimacy, sustainability, and the risk of narrative displacement. The diaspora's impact is thus characterized by productive contradictions: they are essential yet peripheral, amplifying yet potentially overshadowing, committed yet transient. Understanding these dualities is crucial for comprehending how diasporas influence political developments in their countries of origin.

As Nigeria continues to face governance and human rights challenges, the diaspora's role in advocating for change and holding the government accountable remains indispensable. This research contributes to understanding transnational activism by examining the strengths and limitations of diaspora involvement and offering insights for other African diasporas supporting grassroots movements. Future research should explore the role of diasporas in socio-political movements across Africa where similar movements such as #ShutdownZimbabwe, #FreeSenegal, and #RejectFinanceBill in Kenya have taken place. These comparative analyses could enrich regional discourse. Theoretically this article advances the idea that diasporas function as hybrid political actors who connect the domestic and international spheres of governance. Their ability to mobilize resources, shape narratives, and exert external pressure positions them as critical agents in the political developments of their homelands.

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