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Civilian Rights and the need for Protection against Police Brutality During Nonviolent Protests in Post Independent Nigeria

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Abstract

Civilian rights in Nigeria have been under a series of attacks, including the failing responsibility to protect people from police attacks. People have faced several police brutality with their rights being stapled on. It is impossible to deny the existence of human rights during that era, notwithstanding instances of flagrant abuses in traditional Nigerian society. This study will examine civilian rights and the need for protection against police brutality during nonviolent protests in Nigeria. Primary data will be used via the online key informant interview (KII), and secondary data will be collected from articles, journals, government reports, newspapers, and the Internet. This study considers the objective of why civilian rights have been infringed and the possibility of protection against police brutality in the country. Results and findings from the survey show that there should be a high prioritization of civilian rights, and police brutality must stop. Working on the legal framework and creating a safe space for protesters is important in achieving better inclusiveness in the country. The study concluded that civilian rights must be protected, and the nonviolent principles of respect for all must be upheld. Also, the implementation of strong policies that will checkmate the unnecessary persecution of the common citizens by security forces should be done by the government.

Keywords: Civilian rights, Police brutality, Nonviolent protests, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa; of its 200 million or more citizens, almost 60% are under 25.[1] More than 250 ethnic groups who speak 500 different languages and identify with a wide range of cultures live in the

[1] Sakor, B.Z., & Soko, V. (2020, November 24). *Police brutality and nonviolent protest: The case of Nigeria.* https://blogs.prio.org/2020/11/police-brutality-and-nonviolent-protest-the-case-of-nigeria/

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multinational state of Nigeria.[2] With a combined population of nearly 60%, the three main ethnic groups are the Hausa in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east.

With the diversity in the socio-cultural and population landscape, the country is faced with the abuse of civil rights and historical issues of protest. The issue from Nigeria's military dictatorship, which lasted for fifteen years, was characterized by systematic human rights violations, political repression, and economic collapse.[3] The restoration of civilian government under Olusegun Obasanjo came about on May 29, 1999, as a result of a protracted struggle for democracy that grew more intense after June 12, 1993, elections were annulled and the deaths of General Sani Abacha, the head of state, and Moshood Abiola, the presumed winner of the 1993 elections, in 1998.[4]

The legal safeguards known as civil rights, which have been in place since the latter half of the 20th century and are still in place today, protect people or groups from specific types of persecution.[5] Although these are frequently hidden in foundational or origin stories that take on an abstract, timeless quality, the beginnings of civil rights can be discovered in the actions of governments, influential people, or institutions that came to be perceived as repressive, according to Longley,[6] a set of legally protected rights known as civil rights shield people's liberties from being unjustly restricted or denied by the government, private groups, or other entities. A few examples of civil rights are people's rights to work, learn, eat, and live where they choose.

The most widely recognized civil rights include the freedom of expression, association, and religion; the right to personal security, which includes safeguards for those who are suspected of or accused of crimes; the right to vote and to take part in democratic political processes; and the prohibition of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. The 1999 Nigerian constitution guarantees human or civil rights.[7] Enshrined in numerous current laws are every Nigerian citizen's right, obligations, liabilities, and advantages.[8] Nonetheless, Chapter IV of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution

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[2] Pereltsvaig, A. (2011, June 16). Linguistic diversity in Africa and Europe. https://www.languagesoftheworld.info/geolinguistics/linguistic-diversity-in-africa-and-europe.html

[3] Human Rights Watch. (2020, October 16). Nigeria: Crackdown on Police Brutality Protests. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/16/nigeria-crackdown-police-brutality-protests

[4] Campbell, J., and Jack McCaslin, J. (2019, November 21). *Abacha, Abiola, and Nigeria's 1999 transition to civilian rule.* https://www.cfr.org/blog/abacha-abiola-and-nigerias-1999-transition-civilian-rule

[5] Kairys, D. (2015). *Civil rights.* In J.D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition) (pp.686-690).* Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.86009-2

[6] Longley, R. (2022, May 17). *What are civil rights? Definition and examples.* https://www.thoughtco.com/civil-rights-definition-4688614

[7] Amnesty International Nigeria. (2019). *Nigeria: human rights agenda.* Amnesty International Nigeria – via Amnesty.

[8] Adu, D., & Randle, E. (2022, August 15). *Nigeria: Fundamental human rights under the 1999 constitution (As Amended).* https://www.mondaq.com/nigeria/human-rights/1221232/fundamental-human-rights-under-the-1999-constitution-as-amended

guarantees several rights, known as inalienable rights. For instance, the Nigerian Constitution allows for free, peaceful, and coordinated protest against any policy or issues that do not go well to the general public or individual.

Meanwhile, these civil rights are being tampered with, including police brutality against innocent citizens. "The constitution is supreme, and its provisions shall have binding force on all authorities and persons throughout the Federal Republic of Nigeria," according to section 1(1) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 constitution.[9] Federal institutions like the police force are tasked with upholding human rights and overlook the aforementioned constitutional clause. The way they approach their task demonstrates that they disregard the constitutional provisions. For the common people, the law was created. That explains why civil rights are being violated in Nigeria. A few individuals are above the law. Laws can be twisted to benefit certain individuals.[10] All people are equal in the sense that they are human.

Observing the issue of police brutality during and after nonviolent protests in Nigeria, there are cases of extracting money, getting information, and forcing confessions during criminal investigations, and police frequently utilize torture. There are also reports of how the Nigerian Police personnel who have been implicated in crimes are rarely prosecuted for them, even in the face of overwhelming proof of wrongdoing.[11] Amnesty International identified 82 incidences of torture and ill-treatment over three years for its most current report on human rights abuses caused by SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad), and it did not find a single instance of a police officer facing charges. Officers were instead able to retire, be assigned to other organizations, or even be nominated to posts in state administration.

The need for civilian rights protection during and after nonviolence must be emphasized. Protests are vital in our Nigerian political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Protests have always spurred constructive societal change. People and groups can voice their disagreements, thoughts, and complaints about the actions or inactions of the government by participating in protests. Protests draw attention to the mismanagement of power and call for its correction. The Nigerian Constitution and other international and regional human rights frameworks safeguard the right to peaceful protest. The Public Order Act of Nigeria is intended to encourage the proper and nonviolent conduct of gatherings, processions, and peaceful assemblies (protests).[12] However, the Nigerian government disregards the freedom to peaceful protest, especially when those protests are directed against the administration. Against this backdrop, the study will investigate civilian rights and the need for

[9] The Nigerian Constitution. (1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm
[10] Ofoegbu, J.U. (2014). The place of human rights in Nigeria's democracy. OGIRISI: a New Journal of African Studies, 10, 60-78
[11] Jimada, Z. (2021, October 22). *Addressing police brutality in Nigeria – A Crisis of Non-Implementation.* https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/addressing-police-brutality-in-nigeria-a-crisis-of-non-implementation/
[12] Ekeke, A.C. (2023). Right to peaceful protest in Nigeria and the recurrent syndrome of brutalization: The #EndSARS protest debacle. *Journal of African Law, 67*(2), 317-327. doi:10.1017/S0021855323000050

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protection against police brutality during nonviolence protests in post independent Nigeria.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to investigate civilian rights and the need for protection against police brutality during nonviolent protests in post independent Nigeria. This research supports the idea that, particularly in a democratic country like Nigeria, civilians should be free to peacefully protest government actions or decisions to voice their disapproval or discontent freely. Meanwhile, the following objectives will be considered:

To discuss the meaning and why civilian rights in a fragile democratic state like Nigeria;

1. To examine the implications of police brutality on civilian rights protests in post independent Nigeria;

2. To ascertain the need for protection against police brutality during nonviolent protests in post independent Nigeria and

3. To examine the suggestions in protecting civilian rights against police brutality in post independent Nigeria.

Research Method

The study used qualitative content analysis, including online key informant interviews with 15 participants from four states (Lagos, Ogun, Plateau and Oyo state). The process of condensing raw data into categories or themes based on reliable inference and interpretation is known as qualitative content analysis. Through the researcher's meticulous inspection and ongoing data comparison, themes and categories are inferred from the data using inductive reasoning.

Purposive sampling will be used during the interview. Meanwhile, these interview sessions will entail the physical and online derivation of responses from participants. A set of transparent, methodical data processing techniques is necessary for qualitative content analysis to provide valid and trustworthy conclusions.[13] The study ensures the right use of various keywords that correspond to the series of questions, which enables the study to build a more empirical understanding of civilian rights and the need for protection against police brutality in post independent Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Civilian Rights: From where did civil rights originate? Like natural and human rights, civil rights differ greatly depending on the period and location. "Civil rights" is derived from the Latin jus civis, which means "right of the citizen." In the past, everyone had certain rights, but "civil rights" were reserved for

[13] Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B.M. (2005). Qualitative Analysis of Content by. *Human Brain Mapping, 30*(7), 2197-2206.

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citizens. Individuals have the right to civil rights protection from discrimination based on personal attributes such as age, gender, race, or handicap.[14] Governments pass civil rights laws to prevent discrimination in social domains like housing, work, education, and public facilities. The freedom to vote, the right to a fair trial, the right to government services, the right to a public education, and the use of public facilities are a few examples of civil rights.[15] Democratic societies must respect civil rights, and people's civil rights are violated when they are not allowed to engage in political life and other civic duties.

The government of Nigeria possesses a basic understanding of the concepts of civil rights. However, it is different from their lexicon in real life. Although her people's core human rights were made clear in the 1999 constitution, individuals in positions of power continue to ignore these rights. Nearly every government entity tasked with advancing and defending human rights and dignity has fallen short, if not completely, of expectations.

Police Brutality: In general, the term "police brutality" refers to a variety of human rights abuses committed by police, such as beatings, racial abuse, unlawful killings, torture, or the careless application of riot control agents during demonstrations.[16] Police abuse of unarmed young people is a violation of their human rights since it might result in the denial of their basic right to life. The rights to liberty and security, freedom from discrimination, and equal protection under the law can all be violated by police using unlawful force.

In order to tackle armed robberies and other violent crimes, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was established in 1992.[17] However, since the unit's founding, it has allegedly been linked to several violations of human rights, such as extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detentions, and extortion. Many Nigerians believe that the unit has specifically targeted and profiled young individuals, particularly those who have visible goods like laptops and phones and who have tattoos or dreadlocks. Though little has changed, Nigerian authorities have made numerous promises over the years to overhaul the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and guarantee accountability for misbehavior by its officers.

The issue of police brutality across Nigeria led to nonviolence protests. One of the best examples of how young people came together to protest the cruel actions of the Nigerian Police Force's Special Anti-Robbery Squad is the October 2020 EndSARS movement. The movement from the streets of Twitter to the

[14] Longley, R. (2022, May 17). *What are civil rights? Definition and examples.* https://www.thoughtco.com/civil-rights-definition-4688614
[15] Shapiro, I., Froomkin, D., & Dahl, R.A. (2023, December 26). *Democracy. Encyclopedia Britannica.* https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy
[16] Amnesty International. (2021). *What is "police brutality"?* https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/police-brutality/
[17] Human Rights Watch. (2020, October 16). Nigeria: Crackdown on Police Brutality Protests. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/16/nigeria-crackdown-police-brutality-protests

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streets of Nigeria was sparked by the purported murder of a young Nigerian in Delta State.[18]

Nonviolence Protest: Without violence, nonviolence protest is a potent means of defending one's freedom, rights, and justice. When individuals engage in nonviolent protest, they remove their cooperation from an oppressive system by nonviolent means, including strikes, boycotts, large-scale civil resistance, and many more. Meanwhile, the International Center on Nonviolence Conflict[19] states that nonviolent protest or civil resistance has been employed historically for a variety of reasons, including:

1. Ensuring the accountability of companies, governments, and other non-state actors
2. Achieving the rights of women, minorities, indigenous peoples, labor, and democracy.
3. Campaigns against corruption and for openness
4. Struggles with self-determination
5. Fending off alien occupation
6. Campaigns to lessen fatal violence in conflict areas and to improve public and community safety
7. Sustainability and conservation of the environment
8. Reform of land
9. Numerous additional reasons

In Nigeria, nonviolent protest is demonstrated by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Nigerian Youths, various unions, etc., in fighting for the rights of their members or the general public.[20] [21]

[18] Oluwatoye, A. (2022, April 8). *Civil resistance; still the only solution to human rights abuses in Nigeria.* https://bbforpeace.org/blog/2022/04/08/civil-resistance-still-the-only-solution-to-human-rights-abuses-in-nigeria/
[19] International Centre on Nonviolence Conflict. (n.d.). Civil Resistance. https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/about/civil-resistance/
[20] Popoola, N., Tolu-Kolawole, D., and Aina, D. (2023, December 20). *Cash crunch: NLC warns FG of mass protest, again, banks cut withdrawals.* https://punchng.com/cash-crunch-nlc-warns-fg-of-mass-protest-again-banks-cut-withdrawals/
[21] Adewale, Z. (2023, December 23). *Minister lists ASUU's demands already met by Nigerian govt.* https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/653644-minister-lists-asuus-demands-already-met-by-nigerian-govt.html

Findings and Discussion

1. Why Civilian Rights in Post Independent Nigeria?

One of the most essential and fundamental tenets of democracy is the human right. Civilian rights are ethical precepts or standards delineating particular benchmarks for human conduct. They are consistently safeguarded as legal rights within domestic and global legal frameworks. Civilian rights, according to Aduba,[22] are inherent to every human being; as such, they define and validate that person's humanity. As such, they guarantee that human rights are sacred and that injustice and inhumanity are avoided or minimized. He argued that no right may be suppressed to advance another right because these rights are unalienable, which means they cannot be taken away or given up. They are also indivisible. The following have been recognized as fundamental human rights by the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. rights to life, freedom from enslavement or torture, a fair trial, and the right to free expression, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, freedom of movement, rights debates, right to keep and bear arms, future generation, sexual orientation and gender identity, trade, water, sexual and reproductive rights, and asylum are just a few of the issues that are covered.[23]

The various fundamental human rights under Chapter IV of the 1999 Constitution include the right to life; the dignity of the human person; liberty, fair hearing; private and family life; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom of expression and press; peaceful assembly and association; movement; freedom from discrimination; right to acquire and own immovable property among others.[24]

Even while we humans have an inbuilt grasp of the rights that other people should have (such as the right to food), knowing these concepts by themselves is insufficient to shield someone when they believe their rights have been violated. For this reason, the UN established an international body of human rights legislation. Nigeria is a signatory to several treaties that outright forbid torture, such as the Convention against Torture (CAT), which requires states to take proactive steps to stop torture crimes occurring within their borders. Additionally, torture is forbidden by the Nigerian Constitution, and those who engage in it face up to 25 years in prison, according to the Anti-Torture Act. Legal protections against arbitrary detention and arrest are in place, as are procedures for monitoring the Nigerian Police Force (NPF). However, the

[22] Aduba, J. N. (2012). *Inquiries on human rights practice in Nigeria, past, present and future.* Inaugural Lectures, University of Jos Lecture Series, 54, June 29.
[23] Brown, G. (2016). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the 21st Century: A Living Document in a Changing World. Open Book Publishers. ISBN 978-1-783-74218-9.
[24] Adu, D., & Randle, E. (2022, August 15). *Nigeria: Fundamental human rights under the 1999 constitution (As Amended).* https://www.mondaq.com/nigeria/human-rights/1221232/fundamental-human-rights-under-the-1999-constitution-as-amended

continued widespread use of torture and other acts of police brutality shows how indifferent Nigerian officials are to the application of the law.

Nigerian youth were motivated by Black Lives Matter to demand substantive change from the authorities who claimed to be there to help them. Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) symbolized the Nigerian security services' broader disrespect for human life and dignity. The unit's dissolution will mean something once the change that #EndSARS demands is implemented. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) needs structural reform, regardless of differing opinions regarding the character of the demonstrations and coordinated attempts by the government to discredit the movement as a whole.

Civil rights are also based on acknowledging that the emergence of political and economic stability depends on a minimum degree of social order. Support for this minimal order requires a minimum of consensus rather than just compulsion.[25] The common ideals of accountability, individual liberty, honesty, fair and equal representation, inclusion and participation, and peaceful resolution of disputes serve as the foundation for civilian rights. The core principles of popular sovereignty and collective decision-making—in which people under authority hold their rulers accountable in various ways—are the foundation of contemporary views of democracy.[26] [27]

2. Implications of Police Brutality on Civilian Rights in Post Independent Nigeria

Most of the time, the police officers on duty are not to blame for the crackdown they have on demonstrators. Political leaders frequently give the order to use tear gas during any protest that they perceive as challenging their authority or status.[28] As it is noted, the #EndSARS demonstration began peacefully before some supposedly paid goons broke into the event, attacking law-abiding protestors and inflicting numerous injuries in the process. When politicians issue commands like "shoot aside," police brutality may become political.

> *"Under the pretext of restoring order, horrific injuries were inflicted on hundreds of people, and at least 56 people were killed, among them dozens of young people lost their lives as Nigerian security forces used unnecessary and excessive force to disperse peaceful protesters across the country. It is unacceptable that despite overwhelming evidence, the government continues to deny the use of live ammunition on protesters at Lekki toll gate exactly a year ago." - Osai Ojigho, Director of Amnesty International Nigeria.*

[25] Carter, M., & Marenin, O. (1979). Human rights in the Nigerian context - A case study and discussion of the Nigerian Police. *Universal Human Rights Volume, 1(*2), 43-61
[26] Beetham, D., Carvalho, E., Landman, T., & Weir, S. (2008). *Assessing the quality of democracy: A Practical Guide.* Stockholm: International IDEA.
[27] Landman, T. (2013). *Human rights and democracy: The precarious triumph of ideals.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.
[28] Onwunyirimadu, J.C. (2022). Police brutality and violation of human rights in Nigeria – causes and implications. *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research, 10*(2), 12-22

The effects of police brutality on civilians cannot be overemphasized, and issues of protecting people's rights remain in jeopardy. The following are mixed data derived from the online analysis of respondents on the implications of police brutality on civilian rights in Nigeria:

According to Onwunyirimadu,[29] the ability of the general public to peacefully demonstrate against some of the undesirable policies of the government has been hampered by the aggressive behavior of some police officers, which has violated the people's fundamental right to free speech. There have been documented instances of police suppression of demonstrators for #EndSARS, the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, and the now-outlawed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), among other groups.

Civilian rights are severely violated by police brutality, which breeds insecurity. Insecurity is the outcome of numerous instances of human rights violations and police brutality. According to Berk,[30] the legitimacy and popular empowerment of the police in a democratic setting are essential for advancing the realization of the interests and aspirations of the people. These traits must be mutually reinforcing. However, in this particular environment, the Nigerian police have regrettably been based on law-and-order violations, corruption, crudeness, and fragrant disdain for the law. Indeed, brutality, incompetence, corruption, and a host of other social vices that run counter to accepted moral standards have all been features of police behavior across the country. From respondent opinions on the implication of police brutality in Nigeria, the following statements were made:

- Police brutality has led to the loss of lives of civilians, e.g., during the EndSARS protest
- It makes civilians lose hope in the police commission.
- Many civilians have been unlawfully detained
- It reduces trust in the police. It brings citizens against the police and vice versa and could lead to chaos in society.
- Violation of fundamental human rights.
- And citizens' non-belief in the supremacy of the law.

To support the above statements, Oni et al.[31] reported that police brutality in Nigeria has severe implications for civilian rights, eroding the very foundation of a just and free society. It undermines trust in law enforcement, instills fear in the populace, and jeopardizes citizens' right to life, dignity, and security. Additionally, it can lead to a breakdown of the rule of law, hindering the protection of individual freedoms and creating a climate of impunity.

[29] Onwunyirimadu, J.C. (2022). Police brutality and violation of human rights in Nigeria – causes and implications. *Global Journal of Politics and Law Research, 10*(2), 12-22
[30] Berk, L. E. (2004). *Rethinking civil society: Toward democratic consolidation.* Lagos, USIS
[31] Oni, O., Momoh, AU., Nwadioha, E. (2021). Insecurity: Police Brutality and Human Rights Violation in Nigeria. In Ochigbo, Beetseh, and Abubakar ed., Global Insecurities: Challenges and the ways forward. 1st ed. Akure: Science and Education Development Inst., Nigeria, pp. 154-164.

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Addressing police brutality is essential for upholding and safeguarding the rights of civilians.

3. The need for Protection Against Police Brutality During Nonviolent Protests in Post Independent Nigeria

Nigerian youths embraced the Nigeria Police Force's (NPF) 2017 campaign against brutality.[32] The aim was to incite widespread mobilization against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), an NPF division established to address armed robberies. The campaign, known on social media as #EndSARS, used a combination of offline and online tactics. Citing several abuses against Nigerian youth, over ten thousand Nigerians signed a petition demanding the unit's disbandment and presented it to the National Assembly. However, only a little changed despite the efforts of the vice president, the police chief, the National Assembly, and the National Human Rights Commission. Protection against police brutality in the country is important in achieving a peaceful and democratic country. The following analysis and discourse were found from both people's opinions and secondary data:

- This is to ensure good governance within the polity

Protection against police brutality during nonviolent protests in Nigeria is crucial to uphold the democratic right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. Nonviolent protests are legitimate forms of civic engagement, and when met with brutality, they not only infringe upon these fundamental rights but also create a chilling effect on public dissent. Safeguarding against police brutality ensures that citizens can exercise their democratic rights without fear of violence, fostering a society where peaceful expression is respected and protected.

- The citizens will be able to express their dissatisfaction with government policy or actions.
- There is a need for protection, but people should be safe in the hands of security, not be victims.
- Protection can help save lives and properties of civilians

Nonviolent protest is a means of promoting conditions that lead to good governance. It also helps to strengthen the participation of the populace in governance, thus necessitating the protection of civilians in protest.

- To bring about the needed public trust in policing
- It is a constitutional duty to protect lives
- Because those in power who oppose a protest can send forces to destabilize the protest without fear of consequences or Civil rights.

[32] Wodu, N. (2020, October 16). Nigerians Cry Out Against Police Brutality. https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerians-cry-out-against-police-brutality

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- Preservation of human rights and protection of constitutional authority and provisions.
- It is crucial to uphold the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.
- There is a need for protection against police brutality because it will help citizens exercise their rights in a positive way

According to Chinedu,[33] police have persisted in abusing and violently attacking Nigerian civilians without cause or consequence. The strong political class corrupted its coercive powers, which included a monopoly on lethal weapons and the use of force. It utilized them to uphold the current oppression and inequality against Nigeria's populace. As a result, the police continue to violate several freedoms and rights that are granted by the Nigerian constitution, including the right to life, privacy, a fair trial, and the freedom of assembly.

Challenges of Protecting Civilian Rights in Post Independent Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's constitution forbids unlawful civilian violations. However, state and federal authorities persisted in violating these rights, with Police continuing to invade residents' houses without proper search warrants.

- Government unwillingness and lack of trained personnel.

Protecting civilian rights in Nigeria faces various challenges, including systemic corruption, inadequate legal frameworks, and a lack of accountability. Additionally, there are issues with law enforcement training, leading to instances of abuse and brutality. The judiciary may also encounter challenges in ensuring swift and fair justice. Socioeconomic factors, cultural influences, and political pressures further complicate the efforts to establish and maintain robust protection for civilian rights in the country. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive legal, institutional, and societal reforms. Civilians are armless; they can't defend themselves, but the Police should do so. The lives and properties of the civilians are not protected; they are vulnerable, especially women and children.

- Ignorance of the law and illiteracy from the police officers

- Lack of Political will to act and Gross impunity

Some police officers have acted with impunity, thinking that nothing would happen, as the expression goes, because the Nigerian Police Commission has not been able to sufficiently punish members of the force who violate a suspect's rights. This result corroborated Global Glow's[34] observation that, as long as

[33] Chinedu, U.K. (2023). Behind the Uniform: Police Violence and Abuse after #Endsars Protests in Nigeria (2021-2023). *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences, 19*(2), 54-65

[34] Global Glow (2020, November 4). *Police brutality in Nigeria. An unending Nightmare.* https://globalgirlsglow.org/police-brutality-in-nigeria-anunending-nightmare/

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incidents like this continue, police violence has created an unquenchable sense of mistrust. The main characteristics of the relationships between Nigerians and Nigerian Police are mistrust, bias, violence, and brutality.

The fact that the Police Act, which created the NPF, needs to be updated is another factor. Adopted in 1943, the statute grants police personnel extensive discretionary authority. These give Police the authority to conduct warrantless searches and make arrests based on only a reasonable suspicion of guilt or even the desire to commit an offense. This is the main accusation leveled against SARS: victims' phones were taken without a warrant, and some were detained because of their dreadlocks or tattoos.[35] [36] [37]

- Those in power have the power to win over the Lawyers, Barristers or Practitioners

- The unwillingness of key stakeholders to protect the national interest and support those that

The absence of accountability for the activities of SARS and other security personnel is a significant contributing factor to their violations of human rights. The police hierarchy frequently defends security personnel who violate human rights, and victims are unwilling to speak out for fear of being singled out once more. Since the National Assembly passed the Anti-Torture Act of 2017, the government has not brought any charges against a single SARS operator.[38]

- Lack of political will to transform the police commission.

- Protecting civilian rights in Nigeria faces challenges like systemic corruption, inadequate law enforcement training, slow judicial processes, and issues of rights awareness and socioeconomic disparities, necessitating ongoing comprehensive reforms. Bribery and corruption, bureaucracy, lack of information, citizens not knowing their rights etc.

- Poverty, Discrimination, impunity, etc.

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[35] Obiejesi, K. (2019, April 12). *Trending video: SARS operatives beat young man to a pulp for 'refusing to unlock phone'.* https://www.icirnigeria.org/trending-video-sars-operatives-beat-young-man-to-a-pulp-for-refusing-to-unlock-phone/

[36] Egbunike, N. (2019, April 7). *Young, dreadlocked or tattooed in Nigeria? Police might harass or kill you*. https://globalvoices.org/2019/04/07/young-dreadlocked-or-tattooed-in-nigeria-police-might-harass-or-kill-you/

[37] Lambo, D. (2019, July 26). Tattoo tragedy: Musician shot by police for having tattoos dies. https://punchng.com/tattoo-tragedy-musician-shot-by-police-for-having-tattoos-dies/

[38] Amnesty International. (2020, June 26). *Nigeria: Time to end impunity: Torture and other human rights violations by special anti-robbery squad (SARS).* https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/9505/2020/en/

It is unfortunate to learn that corruption in public services led to this infraction. Corruption has generally permeated every aspect of Nigerian life.[39] A violation of citizens' rights occurs when dishonest leaders are employed in public services. The millions of voices demanding police reform should be heard by the Nigerian government, which should seize the chance to improve links between the Police and the public. This circumstance has continued to support aggressive and abusive policing and to worsen impunity within the Nigerian Police. Ojo,[40] contends that rather than acting as a catalyst for social change, the police force as an institution aid in maintaining, reproducing, and fortifying the current social order. Therefore, the Police uphold a repressive, exploitative, and unfair social order by stifling and dissuading calls for democracy and the abolition of injustice and oppression. As a result, the Nigeria Police, established as an instrument of the ruling class to maintain a stable social order, still exists in that capacity.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental rights widely acknowledged and safeguarded is the right to freedom of expression. People can express themselves as collective members through public picketing, marches, rallies, and demonstrations thanks to the freedom of peaceful assembly. Whether or not they are related to civilian rights, assemblies can serve as forums for people to speak out on behalf of causes that are important to them and to campaign for change. In light of this, nations are required to protect the freedom of assembly, as stipulated in Section 40 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which grants its inhabitants the right to assemble and associate with one another freely. They cannot impede the freedom to peacefully assemble in protest because it rejects the demonstrators' viewpoints. They must ensure that everyone has the same access to the right and is free from all forms of discrimination. This study has maintained that police brutality against Nigerians will continue to affect the human rights of the people and create a great division between the security force and the people.

Recommendations

Following a detailed investigation and analysis of the cases, reasons, and consequences of police brutality and human rights violations in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made for the government and stakeholders to stop future police brutality and civilian rights abuse in Nigeria.

1. Stopping the culture of impunity by bringing charges against involved police personnel under the Anti-torture Act is a crucial first step.

[39] Adetoro, R.A., & Omiyefa M.O. (2014). Challenges of human rights abuses in Nigerian democratic governance – which way forward? *Journal of Social Economics Research, 1*(5), 87-96

[40] Ojo, S.A. (2011). *Challenges of indiscipline in the Nigeria Police and its implication for national security.* A Ph.D. submitted to the Institute of Africa Studies (IAS), University of Ibadan in partial fulfillment of Requirements for award of degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PCS) of the University of Ibadan

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2. Additionally, the government needs to make a concerted effort to implement reform suggestions and pertinent legislation. One such statute is the updated Police Act, which replaced the outdated colonial-era legislation. These will demonstrate a sincere desire to alter the current situation.

3. Political will and implementation of reports regarding police brutality should be implemented.

4. Nigerian police officers should receive competitive pay and promotions when they are due; this will help them meet their necessities and reduce the temptation to participate in illicit activities.

5. In the police force, promotions and appointments should only be made based on merit.

6. The amount of money the police spend on retraining and training new officers should be raised, and the funds should be wisely spent.

7. Through reforming the Nigerian police force by taking accountability and transparency in their duties.

8. The government should commit to the international human rights declaration and ensure the safety of the Nigerian people.

9. Nigerian law enforcement institutions, and the Nigerian police in particular, require reorientation since they must comprehend their responsibilities and learn that upholding citizens' rights is one of them.

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