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# MOB JUSTICE AGAINST NIGERIAN POLICE PERSONNEL DURING THE ENDSARS PROTESTS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the EndSARS protests in Ibadan Metropolis, focusing on precipitating factors and implications for police service delivery. Anchored in Procedural Justice Theory, it conceptualises mob attacks on officers as manifestations of the deep-seated legitimacy deficits from long-standing police brutality, corruption, and weak accountability especially in the defunct Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). Using exploratory qualitative design, data were generated through 25 in-depth interviews with protesters and witnesses, and 10 key informant interviews with police officers across two major police formations in Ibadan. Content analysis was employed to interpret participants' narratives. Findings reveal that mob justice was driven by structural and institutional factors including youth unemployment, economic hardship, poor governance frustration, persistent police misconduct, and eroded trust in the Nigerian Police Force and state. Accumulated grievances and impunity for abuses created moral justifications for violent retaliation. Mob attacks impaired service delivery by undermining morale, increasing officer fear and withdrawal, reducing visibility, and emboldening crime weakening routine policing, straining police–community relations, and compromising post-protest security. The findings show mob justice as both symptom and consequence of collapsed police legitimacy. The study underscores comprehensive police reform, credible accountability, and community-centred strategies to restore trust, prevent protest violence cycles, and strengthen urban law enforcement.*

**Keyword:** EndSARS, Mob Justice, Nigerian Police Force, Police–Community Relations, Procedural Justice, Collective Violence, Protests

## INTRODUCTION

The maintenance of law and order constitutes one of the most fundamental responsibilities of the modern state, with the police institution serving as the primary agency responsible for enforcing laws, protecting lives and property, and facilitating peaceful coexistence within society. In democratic settings, effective policing is premised on public trust, institutional legitimacy, accountability, and respect for human rights. Where these foundations are weakened, the relationship between the state and citizens becomes fragile, often resulting in resistance, conflict, and the breakdown of public order. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, such fragility has manifested in recurring tensions, violent confrontations, and declining effectiveness of policing institutions (Akinlabi, 2021).

Nigeria's policing system is deeply shaped by its colonial origins, during which the police were structured primarily as an instrument of coercion designed to safeguard colonial authority rather than serve the indigenous population. This legacy of authoritarianism, repression, and militarised policing has persisted into the postcolonial era, significantly influencing public perceptions of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) as corrupt, abusive, and largely unaccountable (Chukwuma, 2020; Tamuno, 2018). Despite multiple reform initiatives since the return to democratic governance in 1999, public confidence in the police has remained persistently low, with widespread allegations

of brutality, extortion, extrajudicial killings, and abuse of power continuing to dominate public discourse (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

One of the most contentious units within the NPF was the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), established in 1992 to combat violent crimes such as armed robbery and kidnapping. Over time, SARS deviated significantly from its mandate and became widely associated with systematic human rights violations, including unlawful arrests, torture, sexual abuse, enforced disappearances, and extrajudicial executions (Amnesty International, 2020). Empirical reports documented routine profiling of young Nigerians based on appearance, possession of digital devices, or perceived lifestyle, often leading to harassment, extortion, and violence (Adeyemi & Akinwale, 2021). These practices intensified public distrust and reinforced the perception of the police as a predatory institution rather than a protective one.

Public grievances against SARS accumulated over several years, giving rise to sporadic protests and digital advocacy campaigns such as #EndSARS and #EndPoliceBrutality. However, these earlier mobilisations achieved limited institutional change, largely due to weak accountability mechanisms and the perceived reluctance of the state to investigate and prosecute offending officers (Akinlabi, 2021). Internal disciplinary measures and complaint units were widely regarded as ineffective, further deepening public cynicism toward both the police and the criminal justice system (Chukwuma, 2020).

The nationwide #EndSARS protests that erupted in October 2020 marked a critical turning point in Nigeria's police-citizen relations. Triggered by viral footage allegedly showing SARS officers killing a young man in Ughelli, Delta State, the protests rapidly spread across major cities and gained international attention (Amnesty International, 2021). The movement was characterised by decentralised leadership, strong youth participation, and extensive use of social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram to mobilise support and disseminate information (Oluwaniyi & Adebayo, 2022). Protesters initially articulated reform-oriented demands, including the disbandment of SARS, prosecution of abusive officers, compensation for victims, and comprehensive police reforms.

Although the Inspector General of Police announced the dissolution of SARS on 11 October 2020 and the creation of a new Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) unit, many protesters viewed these measures as symbolic, given the history of repeated and unfulfilled reform promises (Akinlabi, 2021). As the protests persisted, their scope expanded to include broader grievances relating to youth unemployment, economic inequality, corruption, and governance failures. The movement's trajectory changed dramatically following the alleged shooting of unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos on 20 October 2020. Amnesty International (2021) reported multiple fatalities, an account that was disputed by official narratives but nonetheless intensified public outrage nationwide.

In the aftermath of the Lekki incident where soldiers opened fire on unarmed EndSARS protesters, killing at least 12 people, protests in several locations degenerated into widespread unrest, looting, and violent confrontations. According to Human Rights Watch (2021), criminal elements and political thugs reportedly hijacked the protests, attacking police formations, public infrastructure, and private property. Police stations were burnt, correctional facilities were breached, and inmates were freed in multiple states (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Within this climate of breakdown in public order, police personnel themselves became direct targets of violence, including mob assaults and killings, severely undermining police morale and operational effectiveness.

Ibadan Metropolis, the capital of Oyo State and one of Nigeria's largest urban centres, was significantly affected by these developments. Marked by rapid urbanisation, youth unemployment, socio-economic inequality, and a history of political mobilisation, Ibadan presented conditions conducive to protest escalation and collective violence (Aboh, 2023). During the #EndSARS protests, reports emerged of police officers being attacked, lynched, or killed by mobs acts often rationalised as retaliatory justice for years of perceived police oppression (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Mob justice, also referred to as vigilantism or jungle justice, involves the extrajudicial punishment of individuals by groups acting outside formal legal processes, often through lynching or public violence (Abdulrauf et al., 2018). In Nigeria, mob justice has been linked to pervasive distrust in the criminal justice system, corruption, prolonged judicial delays, and perceptions of impunity (Ilori, 2022). During the #EndSARS protests, this phenomenon assumed a distinctive character as agents of the state particularly police officers became the primary targets of collective violence.

Crime and deviance may reveal underlying social contradictions and provoke reform. However, when collective violence becomes normalised, it undermines the rule of law, erodes human rights protections, and weakens the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force. The mob killing of police personnel during the #EndSARS protests thus represents not only a breakdown of public order but also a profound crisis of institutional legitimacy and police service delivery.

The attacks on police personnel in Ibadan had serious implications for the service delivery capacity of the Nigerian Police Force. Beyond the immediate loss of lives, these incidents disrupted routine policing activities, reduced police visibility, damaged infrastructure, and weakened community cooperation. They also deepened hostility between the police and the public, complicating post-protest efforts to restore normalcy and effective policing (Owolabi, 2023).

In Ibadan Metropolis, reported attacks and killings of police personnel during the protests suggest a severe erosion of trust and institutional legitimacy. However, many existing studies including Akanle and Shokoya (2025), Amnesty International (2021), and Ojedokun, Ogunleye, and Aderinto (2021) treat the #EndSARS experience as a homogenous national phenomenon, overlooking local socio-economic conditions, historical police–community relations, and urban vulnerabilities that may shape protest dynamics and violence. Consequently, there is limited empirical understanding of the specific factors responsible for mob justice against police personnel in Ibadan.

Furthermore, attacks on police officers and infrastructure have significant implications for service delivery. Such violence reduces manpower, heightens fear and withdrawal among officers, disrupts routine policing operations, and weakens public confidence in the police's capacity to maintain security. Yet, the extent to which mob justice during the #EndSARS protests impaired the service delivery capacity of the Nigerian Police Force in Ibadan remains under-researched. Against this backdrop, the present study examines mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the #EndSARS protests in Ibadan Metropolis, with emphasis on the factors responsible for such violence and its implications for police service delivery capacity. Research questions this study engages therefore are: What factors were responsible for mob justice of Nigerian Police Personnel during the EndSARS protests in Ibadan Metropolis? To what extent did mob justice during the EndSARS protests impair the service delivery capacity of the Nigerian Police Force in Ibadan metropolis?

## Review of Literature

Empirical scholarship on the #EndSARS protests consistently demonstrates that long-standing perceptions of police brutality, corruption, and weak accountability mechanisms were central to the deterioration of police–citizen relations in Nigeria. Studies show that public distrust for the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), particularly the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), had accumulated over time due to recurrent reports of human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, and extortion, ultimately triggering widespread protests in October 2020 (Amnesty International, 2021). Ojedokun, Ogunleye, and Aderinto (2021) provide a foundational analysis of this mobilisation process, illustrating how digital activism and mass protests demanded police accountability during #EndSARS, yet highlight gaps in understanding retaliatory violence against police themselves; a void this study addresses in the local context of Ibadan. Digital activism further amplified these grievances, facilitating rapid mobilisation and reinforcing a collective narrative that policing in Nigeria lacked legitimacy and procedural justice (Bello et al., 2023; Frontiers, 2024).

Beyond protest mobilisation, empirical research highlights how the persistence of weak accountability and perceived insincerity of police reforms contributed to the escalation of violence. Studies on protest outcomes indicate that government and police responses, including the dissolution of SARS and creation of SWAT, were widely viewed as symbolic rather than substantive, deepening public distrust and intensifying confrontations (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025). This erosion of institutional legitimacy created conditions in which sections of the public felt morally justified in resorting to extrajudicial actions, including violent reprisals against police officers. Complementing this, Ojedokun and Mijinyawa (2024) examine institutional legacies as triggers for armed violence against police across African countries, revealing manifestations like mob attacks rooted in historical repression directly paralleling #EndSARS dynamics and underscoring the need for this study's empirical focus on Nigeria-specific factors and service delivery impacts.

Although much of the literature focuses on police violence against civilians, emerging studies on mob justice in Nigeria provide important insights into violence directed at state agents. Research shows that mob justice often thrives in contexts characterised by distrust in formal justice institutions, perceived impunity, and ineffective law enforcement (Abdulrauf et al., 2018). In such settings, citizens increasingly rely on informal and violent mechanisms of social control to address perceived injustices. These findings suggest that mob attacks on police personnel during the #EndSARS protests were not isolated acts of criminality but manifestations of a broader institutional breakdown in which police legitimacy had significantly eroded.

Studies on protest dynamics further reveal that the transition from peaceful demonstrations to violent encounters is shaped by distrust in state institutions, perceptions of injustice, and failures of crisis management. Empirical analyses of the #EndSARS protests indicate that poor communication, delayed responses, and lack of accountability by authorities heightened public anger and facilitated the spread of violence across urban centres (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025). Such dynamics reinforce the argument that when political trust collapses, collective violence may emerge as an alternative mode of expressing grievances.

Moreover, evidence shows that persistent impunity for police misconduct has sustained public resentment and weakened the social contract between citizens and the state. Amnesty International (2021) and subsequent studies document how limited prosecutions of abusive officers and ineffective judicial panels entrenched perceptions that the police operated above the law. This context further legitimised, in the eyes of some citizens, the use of mob justice as a substitute for formal accountability (Frontiers, 2024).

Finally, broader empirical research on trust, legitimacy, and protest behaviour indicates that declining confidence in authorities not only reduces compliance with law enforcement but also increases tolerance for, and participation in, violent collective actions (Alang et al., 2020). Applied to the Nigerian context, these findings suggest that the legitimacy crisis exposed by the #EndSARS protests may have lowered normative restraints against violence directed at police personnel.

Existing empirical studies converge on the view that structural failures in policing, accountability, and institutional responsiveness create fertile conditions for mob violence. While prior research has largely examined police brutality and protest mobilisation (e.g., Ojedokun et al., 2021; Ojedokun & Mijinyawa, 2024), the literature provides a strong foundation for interpreting mob justice against police officers as a consequence of collapsed legitimacy and systemic distrust; an issue this study empirically interrogates within the context of Ibadan Metropolis.

### Theoretical Framework

Procedural Justice Theory, developed by Tom R. Tyler, explains why people obey the law and cooperate with legal authorities primarily on the basis of perceived fairness rather than fear of punishment (Tyler, 1990; Tyler, 2006). The theory holds that when authorities exercise power in ways that are neutral, respectful, transparent, and trustworthy, they gain legitimacy, which in turn promotes voluntary compliance and public cooperation. Legitimacy refers to the belief that an institution has the moral right to exercise authority and that its directives ought to be obeyed (Tyler & Huo, 2002; Tankebe, 2013). Where these procedural standards are violated, public trust declines, legal authority is delegitimised, and resistance including violent defiance becomes more likely.

In the Nigerian context, especially within the operations of the defunct Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), routine violations of procedural justice were widely reported, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extortion, and extrajudicial killings (Amnesty International, 2020; Akinlabi, 2021). These practices systematically denied citizens voice, violated neutrality, undermined dignity, and destroyed trust in police intentions. Procedural Justice Theory predicts that such conditions produce not only non-compliance but also moral withdrawal from the authority of the police, whereby citizens no longer feel obligated to respect or protect law enforcement agents (Tyler, 2006; Bottoms & Tankebe, 2012).

Concerning the factors responsible for mob justice against police personnel during the #EndSARS protests in Ibadan. From a procedural justice perspective, mob violence emerged because police legitimacy had collapsed due to long-standing abusive and corrupt policing. As public grievances accumulated and were not addressed through credible accountability mechanisms, citizens came to perceive the police as illegitimate and undeserving of obedience or protection (Akinlabi, 2021; Tankebe, 2013). The alleged shooting of peaceful protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate further confirmed for many Nigerians that the police and the state were neither neutral nor trustworthy, thereby accelerating the moral justification for retaliatory violence against police officers (Amnesty International, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Procedural Justice Theory also provides a direct explanation concerning how mob justice impaired police service delivery in Ibadan. Tyler (2006) demonstrates that effective policing depends on public cooperation and officers' willingness to perform their duties with confidence. When legitimacy collapses and officers become targets of violence, morale declines, risk-avoidant behaviour increases, and proactive policing deteriorates. Empirical studies show that attacks on police undermine visibility, responsiveness, and willingness to engage the public, thereby weakening crime control and public safety (Tankebe & Meško, 2015; Owolabi, 2023). In Ibadan,

mob attacks against police officers during the #EndSARS protests likely reduced operational effectiveness by creating fear, withdrawal, and distrust on both sides of the police–community relationship.

Thus, Procedural Justice Theory links the **causes** of mob justice and its **consequences** for police service delivery within a single analytical framework. Long-term procedural injustice eroded police legitimacy, producing collective hostility and violent retaliation, which in turn further weakened the capacity of the Nigerian Police Force to deliver security in Ibadan. The theory therefore provides a coherent explanation for why mob justice occurred and how it undermined policing outcomes during the #EndSARS protests.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. Ibadan was selected as the study area because it recorded notable incidents of mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the #EndSARS protests in South-West Nigeria. As the capital of Oyo State and the political and administrative centre of the former Western Region, Ibadan occupies a strategic position in Nigeria's socio-political landscape. It is reputed as the largest indigenous city in sub-Saharan Africa and remains a major cultural, economic, and political hub. The city hosts numerous federal and state institutions, including the Federal High Court, the National Industrial Court, research institutes, a teaching hospital, banks, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and diverse private enterprises. These characteristics, combined with rapid urbanisation and youth concentration, make Ibadan a suitable setting for examining protest dynamics and police–citizen relations.

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design. This approach was considered appropriate given the limited empirical research on mob justice against police personnel, particularly within the context of the #EndSARS protests. Qualitative methods enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of events surrounding the protests and the subsequent mob violence. Data were generated through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and key informant interviews (KIIs), allowing for rich, contextualised insights into both civilian and police perspectives.

In total, 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who either participated in the #EndSARS protests or directly witnessed incidents of mob killing of Nigerian Police officers. These interviews were carried out in four locations within Ibadan Metropolis; Ojoo, Iwo Road, Gbagi, and Ogungbade which were purposively selected due to their prominence during the protests and reported cases of mob violence. In addition, 10 key informant interviews were conducted with police officers of varying ranks who served in different police area commands within Ibadan. Two police facilities were selected for this purpose: Eleyele Police Headquarters and the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Iyaganku. The inclusion of both civilian witnesses and police personnel ensured a balanced understanding of the factors driving mob justice and its implications for police service delivery.

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed in selecting participants. Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals and locations with direct relevance to the study, particularly areas that experienced intense protest activities and mob violence. Snowball sampling was subsequently adopted to reach additional participants through referrals, especially given the sensitive nature of the subject and the difficulty of identifying willing respondents. Participants were drawn mainly from #EndSARS protesters, community members who witnessed the events, and officers of the Nigerian Police Force who were directly involved in policing the protests.

All interview sessions were conducted in locations considered safe and convenient for participants. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone and later transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed using manual content analysis. This involved repeated reading of transcripts, identification of recurring themes and patterns, and the use of verbatim quotations to illustrate key findings. Content analysis enabled systematic interpretation of participants' narratives while preserving the depth and context of their lived experiences. To ensure anonymity, no personal identifiers such as names, addresses, or contact details were collected during the interviews.

Ethical considerations were given priority throughout the research process. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Before each interview, the purpose of the study was clearly explained to participants, and informed consent was obtained. Respondents were assured that they could decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. The researcher provided adequate information about the study and assured participants of the confidentiality of their responses. No form of coercion was used, and all data collected were treated with strict confidentiality to protect the identities and safety of the respondents.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Factors Responsible for Mob Justice of Nigerian Police Personnel during the #EndSARS Protest in Ibadan Metropolis**

Findings from this study indicate that mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the #EndSARS protests in Ibadan was driven by a convergence of structural, institutional, and psychosocial factors. Prominent among these were widespread youth unemployment, economic hardship, frustration–aggression arising from poor governance, persistent police brutality, and a deep erosion of public trust in both the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and the government. These factors collectively created an environment in which violence against police personnel was perceived by some citizens as a justified form of retaliation and extrajudicial justice.

These findings are consistent with existing empirical literature which identifies police illegitimacy and perceived injustice as central drivers of collective violence during the #EndSARS protests. Amnesty International (2021) documented long-standing patterns of police brutality, unlawful killings, extortion, and lack of accountability within the NPF, particularly among SARS units, which significantly fuelled public anger. Similarly, Bello et al. (2023) and Frontiers (2024) observed that youth frustration linked to unemployment, economic exclusion, and political marginalisation intensified protest participation and increased tolerance for violence against state agents perceived as oppressive. The frustration–aggression nexus evident in this study aligns with broader analyses showing that economic deprivation and governance failure heighten the likelihood of violent collective action in protest contexts (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025).

Participants' narratives revealed that mob violence against police officers was not random but largely rooted in accumulated grievances arising from repeated encounters with police misconduct. One respondent captured this sentiment succinctly:

“The reason people were involved in the protest and the killing is that the Nigerian government has failed its people; no fundamental human rights, no employment opportunities, bad governance, police brutality, and lack of trust in this government.” **(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Iwo Road)**

In the words of another respondent, it made it so revealing that;

“Youths are asking for justice; they want an end to police brutality. The way police treat youths sometimes is very bad. I have seen a guy waylaid by two police officers from Moniya to Ojoo on a bike, and when they got to Ojoo, the way they handled the guy was very bad; all because they perceived him as a yahoo boy, which had not been confirmed. They too have committed a lot of atrocities; that is why most people in this community supported the killing.” **(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Ojoo)**

This account reflects the broader literature linking mob justice to the collapse of institutional trust and legitimacy. Studies on mob violence in Nigeria show that when formal justice systems are perceived as ineffective or biased, citizens increasingly resort to informal and violent mechanisms of justice (Asogwa et al., 2023). The absence of credible accountability for police abuses during and after the protests further reinforced public perceptions that lawful channels for redress were unavailable (Amnesty International, 2021; Frontiers, 2024).

Respondents also emphasised that direct and indirect experiences of police brutality were critical triggers for mob justice. As one participant explained:

“Most of the people who were involved did so because they had experienced some form of police brutality either directly or indirectly. Many youths are angry because of the situation in the country; you know this government is not doing what they promised us during the election period. People are angry and frustrated as a result of bad governance.” **(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Ojoo)**

Another respondent opined that:

“Most of the officers in this area are not doing their job professionally. Some will just open their mouths and talk to us anyhow. They arrest transporters for no justified reason; if you carry them as passengers, they will refuse to pay for transport.” **(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Adelubi)**

This aligns with Akanle and Shokoya (2025) finding that perceived insincerity of police reforms and weak accountability mechanisms escalated confrontations during the #EndSARS protests. When citizens believe that police violence goes unpunished, retaliatory violence becomes more likely, particularly during periods of mass mobilisation.

Community-level factors also featured prominently in respondents' explanations. Many participants described routine extortion, harassment of youths and commercial drivers, unlawful arrests, and extrajudicial practices as normalised aspects of policing in their communities prior to the protests. These everyday encounters with police misconduct were repeatedly cited as justifications for mob violence:

“Their wicked way of life is not encouraging; the way they forcefully collect money from micra drivers and okada riders is very bad. Youths have been shouting on social media to create awareness, but police authorities and the government did nothing.” **(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Gbagi)**

In the words of another respondent;

“The extortion and unjust killing of people were the major reasons for the incident. I had a personal encounter with some Ojoo police officers when I was coming from my farm: a police officer stopped my personal motorcycle at Ojoo, and when I brought my papers for him, the police officer was touching my pocket, asking me for money, and even suggesting to my friend to lend me money. What saved me that day was that a truck with an overload was coming, and the police officer went to meet the driver to collect money, which gave me an opportunity to start my machine and go my way.” **(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Ojoo)**

Empirical studies corroborate these accounts, showing that persistent impunity for police abuses sustains public grievances and weakens the social contract between citizens and security institutions (Amnesty International, 2021). Asogwa (2021) further notes that mob justice often emerges in contexts where law enforcement is perceived not as a protector but as a source of victimisation.

Digital activism and prolonged governmental inaction also played a significant role in transforming frustration into violent action. Several respondents noted that grievances had been repeatedly expressed through social media platforms before the protests escalated, but the lack of timely and meaningful government response intensified public anger:

“People have been protesting online about the killing of youths by police officers. Nothing was done. People want justice; they want an end to police brutality. We want an end to bad governance and corruption.”  
**(IDI/Male/Mob Justice Witness/Ogungbade)**

This supports findings by Bello et al. (2023), who observed that social media amplified collective grievances during #EndSARS and contributed to rapid mobilisation, while delayed institutional responses increased the risk of protest escalation. The failure of crisis management and communication during the protests further eroded confidence in state institutions, creating conditions conducive to reciprocal violence (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the #EndSARS protests in Ibadan was the product of accumulated socio-economic frustrations, entrenched patterns of police misconduct, lack of accountability, and declining institutional legitimacy. Consistent with existing empirical studies, the violence directed at police personnel can be understood as an extreme manifestation of citizens’ loss of faith in formal justice systems, rather than as isolated acts of criminality. These insights provide a critical empirical basis for interpreting mob justice as both a symptom and consequence of deeper structural and institutional failures in policing and governance in Nigeria.

### **Impact of Mob Justice during the #EndSARS Protests on the Service Delivery Capacity of the Nigeria Police Force in Ibadan Metropolis**

Findings from the study reveal that mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the #EndSARS protests significantly undermined the service delivery capacity of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) in Ibadan Metropolis. Police respondents across ranks consistently reported that the killings, attacks, and public hostility experienced during the protests resulted in widespread demoralisation, fear, reduced operational effectiveness, and declining willingness to engage proactively in policing duties. These experiences not only weakened institutional morale but also created conditions that emboldened criminal activity and intensified public insecurity.

This finding aligns with empirical scholarship indicating that violence directed at law enforcement personnel erodes organisational effectiveness by damaging morale, legitimacy, and officer willingness to engage in risk-laden duties (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025; Frontiers, 2024). Amnesty International (2021) similarly observed that while the #EndSARS protests exposed police abuses, the subsequent targeting of police officers contributed to a fragile post-protest security environment characterised by fear, distrust, and weakened policing capacity.

Police officers interviewed in this study repeatedly emphasised the psychological impact of mob violence on personnel performance. An Inspector explained that the killings directly affects morale and street-level policing:

“It affects the morale, our performance; motivation has gone down as a result of the killing. The crime rate is increasing every day, and justice is growing every day as a result of the absence of our personnel on the street.” **(KII/Male/Inspector/Eleyele Police Headquarters)**

Emerging from one of the policemen:

“The incidents have affected the personnel in so many ways, but because of time, let me be brief. The fact is, when people you are protecting or working for turn against you, it definitely does not encourage or increase your morale. It is as simple as this: police are meant to protect the people and that is what they do day and night; yet the same people you are protecting pick up stones, bottles, and other dangerous weapons against you. From a human perspective, you are expected to have low morale” **(KII/Male/ASP/StateCID Iyaganku/Ibadan)**

In another response, a police man interviewed has this to say:

“It has affected our operations in a big way. Some are even willing to resign to seek better opportunities because they believe their lives are in danger”. **(KII/Female/ASP/Eleyele Police Hq/Ibadan)**

These accounts resonate with studies on police legitimacy and motivation, which show that when officers perceive hostility from the communities they serve, their commitment to proactive policing declines, often resulting in withdrawal from visible crime-prevention roles (Frontiers, 2024). Several respondents noted that fear of being attacked had led officers to prioritise personal safety over public engagement, thereby limiting patrols and reactive policing.

Another officer described how betrayal by the public they were meant to protect contributed to emotional disengagement:

“When people you are protecting turn against you, it definitely does not encourage but kills morale. We are expected to feel discouraged as a result of mob justice against our men.” **(KII/Male/ASP/StateCID Iyaganku)**

This perception reflects broader empirical findings that breakdowns in police–community relations reduce trust, cooperation, and service effectiveness, particularly in post-conflict protest settings (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025).

Beyond morale, respondents highlighted increased resignation intentions and reluctance to confront criminals. A female officer stated:

“Some of us want to leave the job. We are willing to resign to seek better opportunities because we know that our lives are in danger and even the government cannot protect us. There is no provision for that.” **(KII/Female/ASP/Eleyele Police Headquarters)**

Such accounts support evidence that occupational insecurity and perceived lack of institutional protection reduce police retention and operational resilience, especially in contexts where officers believe the state will not adequately compensate or support their families in the event of injury or death (Amnesty International, 2021).

The study further found that mob justice indirectly increased crime rates by emboldening criminal elements. Several officers noted that offenders became more confident in challenging police authority, knowing officers were hesitant to act forcefully:

“Citizens, especially the criminal-minded ones, now believe they can attack police officers as they like. The crime rate after EndSARS is very high compared to before.” **(KII/Male/Inspector/Eleyele Police Headquarters)**

This observation aligns with Asogwa (2021), which argues that mob justice weakens the state’s monopoly on violence and creates permissive environments for criminal activity. When law enforcement authority is visibly challenged without consequences, informal violence and criminal opportunism flourish.

Respondents also described institutional responses characterised largely by restraint and damage control. Officers reported that during the height of the violence, they were instructed to avoid confrontation and limit collateral damage:

“We were shocked that the protesters attacked us; we were disoriented but didn’t expect that to happen. We had to control ourselves; we could not attack them in order to reduce the damage. We controlled our emotions and applied professionalism.” **(KII/Male/Inspector/State CID Iyaganku)**

In the words of another police officer:

“The citizens, especially the youths, now believe they have the right to attack the police. Now with a little argument, they will want to attack the uniformed men without putting into consideration that they are law enforcers”. **(KII/Male/ASP/Eleyele Police Hq/Ibadan)**

While professionalism was emphasised, such restraint also reflected limited capacity to respond effectively under hostile conditions. Empirical literature suggests that crisis policing without adequate support structures often leads to operational paralysis rather than effective conflict resolution (Frontiers, 2024).

The findings further indicate that mob justice affected policing strategies, particularly arrest procedures. Officers reported being instructed to conduct arrests swiftly and discreetly to avoid

public attention, which in turn reduced enforcement visibility. This cautious approach, while protective of officers, constrained crime deterrence and weakened routine law enforcement.

Importantly, police respondents acknowledged internal institutional failures contributing to the crisis. Many officers admitted that corruption, extortion, abuse of power, and poor public relations had damaged police legitimacy long before the protests:

“We have learnt our lessons because all these happened as a result of corruption, extortion, extrajudicial killings, illegal arrests, taking bribes from people, etc. The system is not working; it is bad.” **(KII/Male/Inspector/Eleyele Police Headquarters)**

In the words of another police officer:

“Let me be sincere: police have their faults and the people have theirs as well. Killing should not be the available option. It's like saying we police want to deal with a particular community because there are some criminals there. I am not saying there are no bad eggs in the police; we have them. The police are trying; it's just that the bad eggs are the ones creating problems for us and giving us a bad reputation. The government gives the Nigerian Police Force very little, yet people expect so much. There are some things I would not want to say, but if the government can work on that alone, things will change for the better. We have learnt to do the right things at the right time, perform our call duties accordingly especially the bad ones have learnt their lesson and we hope this will not happen again.” **(KII/Female/ASP/Eleyele Police Hq/Ibadan)**

This self-reflection is consistent with empirical studies that identify police misconduct and lack of accountability as foundational to legitimacy crises that escalate into collective violence (Amnesty International, 2021; Bello et al., 2023).

Respondents also noted post-protest institutional measures, including sensitisation on protest management, arrests of some perpetrators, and incentives for recovery of looted weapons. However, officers expressed scepticism about the adequacy and sustainability of these interventions, echoing scholarly concerns about reform implementation gaps following #EndSARS (Akanle & Shokoya, 2025).

Finally, many officers reframed the protests as fundamentally directed at governance failures rather than policing alone. They argued that police became symbolic targets because they represent the state in everyday interactions:

“The #EndSARS protest was against the government as a whole. Since the police work for the government, they are part of the system. So the #EndSARS protest was basically against the system; the government as a whole.” **KII/Male/Inspector/Eleyele Police Headquarters)**

This perspective aligns with literature suggesting that police often absorb public anger generated by broader socio-economic failures, including unemployment, inflation, and political corruption (Bello et al., 2023; Frontiers, 2024).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that mob justice during the #EndSARS protests severely impaired the service delivery capacity of the Nigerian Police Force in Ibadan by eroding morale,

reducing operational confidence, increasing officer withdrawal, and emboldening criminal activity. Consistent with existing empirical studies, the impact of mob violence extended beyond immediate physical harm to police personnel, producing long-term institutional and security consequences rooted in legitimacy deficits, governance failures, and unresolved structural weaknesses within the policing system.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined mob justice against Nigerian Police personnel during the #EndSARS protests in Ibadan Metropolis, with particular emphasis on the factors responsible for such violence and its implications for police service delivery capacity. The findings reveal that mob justice emerged from a complex interplay of long-standing police misconduct, weak accountability structures, youth unemployment, socio-economic hardship, and widespread distrust in government institutions. Years of perceived police brutality, extortion, and abuse of power especially by SARS operatives had severely eroded public confidence in the Nigerian Police Force, creating a legitimacy deficit that culminated in violent collective action during the protests.

The study further demonstrates that mob justice had profound consequences for police service delivery in Ibadan. Attacks and killings of police personnel significantly weakened morale, reduced operational effectiveness, increased fear and withdrawal among officers, and emboldened criminal activities. Policing strategies became more defensive and risk-averse, limiting visible patrols and proactive law enforcement. These outcomes not only undermined public safety but also deepened hostility between the police and the communities they serve.

Overall, the findings underscore that while the #EndSARS protests were initially driven by legitimate grievances against police misconduct and governance failures, the resort to mob justice represented a breakdown of institutional legitimacy and the rule of law. Without addressing the structural conditions that produced both police abuse and public retaliation, cycles of protest, violence, and weakened policing are likely to recur. The study therefore highlights the urgent need for comprehensive, trust-centred policing reforms and broader governance interventions in urban Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Nigerian Police Force prioritise institutional reforms aimed at rebuilding public trust through sustained accountability, professionalism, and adherence to human rights standards. This should include continuous training on crowd control and protest policing, clear enforcement of disciplinary mechanisms for misconduct, and strengthened internal oversight. Equally important is the implementation of community-oriented policing strategies that promote dialogue, transparency, and collaboration between the police and local communities in Ibadan. Government should also provide adequate welfare support, operational resources, and psychosocial services for police personnel affected by the violence during the #EndSARS protests to restore morale and service delivery capacity. Finally, structured civic engagement and public sensitisation on lawful protest and the dangers of mob justice should be institutionalised to prevent recurrence and promote peaceful state–citizen relations.

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