The Effect of the End-Sars Protest on Voters' Behaviour in the 2023 General Elections: A Study of Auchi, Etsako West LGA, Edo State

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A b s t r a c t

This article delves into the impact of the End-SARS demonstration on voters' behavior in the 2023 general elections within Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. Its objectives encompass evaluating the protest's influence on the political awareness, party allegiance, and voting patterns, utilizing a quantitative approach through survey research design, with a sample size of 400 via Yaro Tammane formula from a populace of around 141,931. Data collection was by random distribution of questionnaires. hypotheses were scrutinized using correlation analysis in SPSS 23. The findings revealed a substantial enhancement in political consciousness among Auchi's youth, alterations in party support dynamics, and impact on voting behavior. Recommendations emphasized the need to cultivate solidarity among the youths irrespective of differences to bolster their influence on governance. Political entities were counseled towards comprehensive youth involvement, urging people-centered governance approach to alleviate discontent and protests, thereby bolstering electoral legitimacy.

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Background to the Study

One of the Nigeria Police's sections, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), was established in 1992 by Simeon Danladi Midenda, a State police commissioner at that point in time. Before being embraced across all federating units in Nigeria by 2002, SARS was based in the Lagos State (News 24, 2020). SARS was designed to counteract the rising crime rates in Lagos, a commercial hub. It is clear that SARS strayed from its intended purpose over time. It gained notoriety for violating Nigerian citizens' human rights in a variety of ways. Amnesty International (2020) claims that the SARS subjected the people of Nigeria to acts of torture, ill-treatment, and extortion between January 2017 and May 2020.

In line with the thought of Alimika (1988), it is not surprising that SARS reflects this notoriety because it was part of a Police Force modelled after the colonial police, which was infamous for its cruelty, incivility, and defending a few who made up the elite class by coercion and violence. The people suffering, and ill-treatment from the institution that was put in place to protect them, resulted in protests. People have frequently considered protest as a reliable source of civic engagement, in expressing discontent and grievances, against the Government or political system. Since it is the people's reactions to a particular happening, it is likely to affect the process of governance especially when it occurs close to the electoral season. Nigeria's election has always been decided by certain major factors such as ethnicity, religion, party inclination, from inception and similarly the youths have always been divided along this line which was masterfully deployed by the political elites over the years to their political advantage and to the loss of the people. But the #END-SARS protest galvanized the Nigerian youth, particularly from the southern part of the Country (Onwunyi & Udegbunam, 2021). This set the unity of the youths beyond the ethno-religious sentiments becoming a unifying factor in Nigeria.

The End-SARS was a protest that took place in Nigeria, bearing on lapses of the Special Anti-robbery Squad known as 'SARS'. This body, set up to combat criminality was found wanting of various human rights abuses and as such, generated a movement of the youths, who were the major victims of these human rights violations and abuse by SARS. The movement which was occasioned by the nefarious activities of SARS erupts into a protest, which became something close to what was experienced during the Arab Spring. These youths in unity, came out to demand the disbandment of SARS, a demand which was granted by President Muhammadu Buhari. There was the creation of another police unit known as the Special Weapon and Tactics Team (SWAT), which was made to cover the void that was created after the disbandment of the SARS unit but then, due to the level of distrust that already existed in the Nigerian society between the government and the people, the protesting youths started clamouring for the end of SWAT, and an end to bad governance.

Ugba & Linus (2021) pointed out that the End-SARS occasioned unity amongst the Nigerian youths, beyond primordial sentiments, which is quite different from what we have seen since independence, where primordial sentiments are the primary causes of

deterioration in the nation. As observed by Ritzer (2000) individuals or groups, would significantly effect change in social policies and structures, when they can surpass customary boundaries. The End-SARS attained unity that transcended customary boundaries just as Igwe (2021) opined that the protest, overcame ethnic strings, religious bias, tribalism, and political barriers in other to put an end to SARS.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2015), young people may contribute positively to development if given the opportunity to flourish. In a similar vein, the UN Youth 2030 Strategy highlighted that young people possess the resiliency and creative problem-solving skills necessary to propel social progress and spur political change in both urban and rural environments. In line with this thought, it would not be wrong to say, that the youths are the vital assets of a country like Nigeria, in other to drive home the desired change and attain the country of their dreams.

The 2020 End-SARS protest became a precursor to the Obidient Movement as many people who partook in this protest moved their structures to the new movement. Most of the actors during the 2020 protest queued behind Peter Obi, whom they hope will meet their aspirations of a meaningful economic and political transformation of the Country when he becomes president. Some analysts (Amnesty International, 2020) believe that the Obidient Movement is the new face of the End-SARS mainly because of the persons that identified with it. Many of those that participated in the End-SARS Protest or supported it and were distraught with the government of the day and its officials on how they handled the killings, especially at the Lekki Toll Gate, swell up its membership. It has been said, even Mr. Obi himself acknowledged, that the Obidient Movement is not the same as the Labour Party but movement would aim for the success of the labour party because of Mr Peter Obi.

Young individuals who are seen to be particularly independent-minded, strong-willed, and disdainful of elder politicians who they claim have done nothing for them are the originators of the "Obidient" movement, especially those who partook in the End-SARS as it has been dubbed by many (Agbim et al., 2023). Significantly According to Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), 71% of those who completed their voter registration were between the ages of 18 and 34, indicating that young Nigerians were yearning for a new era and are set to demonstrate that (Chukwurah, 2022). And this yearning for a new Nigeria which has been triggered by the End-SARS protest resulting in the formation of the obedient movement coupled with the fact that in a democratic dispensation change in the country's leadership position can only be occasioned by elections. the electoral outcome, which refer to the results of elections, including the selection of political candidates, referendum outcomes, and policy decisions made by elected officials and the determination of who holds public office and shape the direction of governance is likely to be affected.

Going by these various opinions, if this unity attained is carried on to the political sphere in terms of electioneering, coupled with the large demography of the youths, the youths would be able to make a significant level of change in the electoral outcome of the 2023 General Elections, Haven broke the jinx of primordial sentiments as observed by Ugba & Linus (2021) during the End-SARS protest which led to further calls for good governance, and the inclusiveness of the youth in governance, bearing in mind that the youths make up about 60% of Nigeria's population according to the claims of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2021) report, there would be a paradigm shift, in the determination of electoral outcome, in other words the results from the election will reflect the position of the citizenry and This could be directed to the fact that the End-SARS protest also contributed to the emergence and support base of the obedient movement which was geared towards the presidential election on February 23 2023 and as such, it becomes interesting to study how End-SARS protest, which promoted unity, surpassing customary boundaries, reflecting the discontent of the people and led to the formulation and popularisation of the obedient movement has impacted on the electoral outcomes, especially in areas where personal interactions help in transmitting new political views like Auchi.

Statement of Problem
The human rights violations cum youth oppression in Nigeria led to the clamour for an end to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad and this call started as a movement, which eventually took over the media space and snowballed into a full-blown protest, as in October 2020, which the youths christened the End-SARS Protest. This protest went on for some days, moving into weeks, with the youths sharing their experience with the special anti-robbery squad and pouring out their grievances, pressing on for their demands to be met and subsequently, the demands of the protesters were met by the government as there was the dissolution of SARS. As observed, End-SARS was able to actualise the dissolution of SARS, as a result of the momentum garnered from the unity of the citizens beyond, the sentiments of religion, ethnicity, tribalism, political alignment, and so on which have, always held sway in the decision of public issues. Having experienced the power of the unison achieved, the protesters started calling for an end to bad governance.

Though they were able to achieve the goal of putting an end to the Special Anti-Robbery Squad unit of the police force, they were unable to radically attain a change in the pattern of governance. This is because, Nigeria practices a democratic system of government, as provided for in the constitution, where change in government can only occur by elections and not protests. In the history of Nigeria's democratic journey, it has been observed, that the political behaviour of the citizens, is gravely influenced by primordial sentiments. And the End-SARS was able to unite the youths beyond primordial sentiments and this united youths became the backbone of the obedient movement which was in support of a political candidate during the electoral season and as such the electorates who tend to vote or partake in electioneering activities based on religious bias, ethnicity, or party politics would find new grounds for making their voting decision. Since the End-SARS

occasioned the unity of the people beyond these sentiments which enabled the protesters to attain the quest of putting an end to SARS, and also helped in the establishment and popularity of the obedient movement which was a movement in support of a candidate, geared towards the 2023 general election, the researcher intends to observe how the unison of the youths impacted the outcome of the 2023 General Elections

Objectives of the Study
The general aim of this study is to assess the impact of the End-SARS protest on electoral outcomes of the 2023 general elections in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. The specific objectives of this study are to:
  i.   Examine, the influence of End-SARS protest on the political consciousness of the youths in the political process in Auchi.
  ii. Highlight the effect of End-SARS protest on party support in Auchi.
  iii. Assess the influence of End-SARS protest on voters' behaviour in Auchi.
  iv. Identify how the change in voters' behaviour influenced the 2023 electoral outcome.

Hypotheses
Ho_1 There is no relationship between End-SARS protest and the political consciousness of the youth in Auchi.
Ho_2 There is no relationship between End-SARS protest and political party support in Auchi.
Ho_3 There is no relationship between End-SARS protest and voters' behaviour in Auchi.

Conceptual Clarification.
Elections
The Collins English Dictionary describes an election as a vote for an official position. Direct, indirect, open, or secret elections are possible. Direct election allows all eligible adults to vote for their preferred candidates (Okorie, & Igwenyi, 2022, p. 45). Election is a democratic process. In indirect elections, voters choose candidates indirectly. However, they elect representatives who vote for their ultimate representation. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a general election is an election usually held periodically where candidates are elected in the constituencies of a nation. The Cambridge Dictionary defines general elections, as an election, in which citizens in a given country vote to choose a representative. For this study, the term general elections will be used to refer to the election of government officials into the central organs of government, and by this we mean; the presidency and the members of the national assembly, though our focus would be the presidential election which was held on the 25th of February 2023.

Electoral Outcome
According to the American Psychological Association (2020) Electoral outcome refers to "the results and consequences of an election, including the distribution of votes, the selection of candidates for office, and the impact on political power and representation".

Electoral outcomes refer to the results of elections, including the selection of political candidates, referendum outcomes, and policy decisions made by elected officials. They determine who holds public office and shape the direction of governance.

For the purpose of this study, electoral outcome will be discussed or rather used in terms of electoral results or scores attained by various political parties cum candidates in the 2023 presidential election

Voters' Behaviour
Voting behaviour refers to how people decide how to vote. This decision is shaped by a complex interplay between an individual voter's attitudes as well as social factors. Voter attitudes include characteristics such as ideological predisposition, party identity, and degree of satisfaction with the existing government, public policy leanings, and feelings about a candidate's personality traits. Social factors include race, religion and degree of religiosity, social and economic class, educational level, regional characteristics, and gender. The degree to which a person identifies with a political party influence voting behaviour, as does social identity. Voter decision-making is not a purely rational endeavour but rather is profoundly influenced by personal and social biases and deeply held beliefs as well as characteristics such as personality, memory, emotions, and other psychological factors Voting advice applications and avoidance of wasted votes through strategic voting can impact voting behaviour.

Protest
Protest refers to the act of expressing one's objection, dissent, or disapproval towards a particular idea, action, policy, or situation. It can take various forms, including peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts strike, and other collective actions aimed at bringing attention to a specific issue and effecting change. Protests can be motivated by various factors, including social, political, economic, and cultural grievances, and are often used as a means of advocating for social justice, human rights, equality, and freedom (Feinberg et al., 2017)

The Concept of End-SARS
End-SARS, according to Uwazuruike (2020), was a call for the dissolution of Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notoriously violent and human rights violating elements of the Nigerian Police Force. It was employed in the year 2018 to draw attention to claims that SARS official had engaged in violence and exploitation. Despite the government's announcement of structural modification to SARS, there was continued alleged exploitation and breaches of human rights. Social media was used to spread the word in October 2020 about the Special Anti-Robbery Squad officers' unjustifiable shooting of a youngster in Delta State. Even though the Nigerian Police Force denied it, the public's rage was not subdued as fresh footage of police shootings circulated online. As social media celebs and activists voiced their support on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, demonstrators in Lagos and Abuja were on the streets within days, calling for the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. As time went on, the protest

continued to spread from one city to another and finally moved to semi-urban Areas too. The government was pressured due to the popularity; the call was generating and succumbed, disbanding the Special Anti-Robbery Squad. In simple terms, End-SARS is a call to dissolve the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS).

Youths
Authorities and organisations around the globe are unable to compromise on what defines a youth. A Youth has been characterised by the United Nations in 1981 as young folks who are between the age brackets of fifteen to twenty-four. Youths are classified under the African Youth Charter (2006) as anyone between the age range of fifteen and thirty-five years old, in accordance with the federal government of Nigeria (2001), youths are regarded as those who fall within the age range of eighteen and thirty-five. The descriptions mentioned above suggest that disregarding differences in youth demographic classification, young people are typically daring and endowed with the vitality, inventiveness, and creativity necessary to effect social change (Ugba & Linus, 2021).

Empirical Review
Numerous investigations have been carried out. As regards protests, their impacts on society in various societal spheres, the possibility of influencing elections and electoral outcomes, and also the End-SARS protest in particular. We shall be having a look at some of these studies. Wallace, Zepeda, & Jones (2014) conducted a study. Although it is hypothesised that protests can entice individuals to get hooked on politics, it is in doubt if this involvement materialises during election seasons. The presence of protests seems to have an elevating cognitive impact through elevated views of political efficacy, which may be one of the goals activists organising open demonstrations.

Zhang (2016) conducted a study in Hong Kong and discovered that, only when the populace was physically exposed, seeing protests had an impact on the level of civic participation and boosted conversations about social and political concerns on social media. Protests appear to have significant local impact, partly because interpersonal relationships are so crucial.

According to Madestam et al. 2013, these connections are vital conduits for the spread of novel political ideas and consequent rises in political participation. Protests according to Banaszak & Ondercin 2016, give the public a signal as to the significance of certain issues, whether it is one involving a process, institution, or policy. In contrast, people may recognise that an issue exist, but not comprehend that there are disparities amongst citizens regarding the subject at hand. This explains in part, why people become more sceptical of the actions of the political class when they are exposed to performers who express their political dissatisfaction.

Olalekan (2018) examines the causes, methods, and fallout from Nigerian protests. He examined occupy Nigeria demonstrations in light of neo liberal reforms, the movements

primary catalyst, goal and accomplishments. He discovered that the movement not only succeeded in changing the economic policies but also produced significant non-institutional effects through the use of institutional mechanisms. Among these non-institutional results were raised political consciousness among movement members and the Nigerian populace at large, as well as heightened public awareness of corruption, waste, and poor management in the public sector. The Occupy Nigeria campaign was successful in compelling the President Jonathan's government to put into effect institutional changes in NNPC, lower the price of premium motor spirit, and reorganise the nation's economy and petroleum industry in 2012 within the ambits of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). A policy shift occurred, but institutional innovations and corruption surfaced as critical political issues that shaped the campaign. As a result, a number of the protesters' leaders and organisers were appointed to political positions or voted into the Legislature. An internal institutional shift occurred with the creation of the All Progressives Congress (APC), a new political party that went on to win the 2015 presidential election. The initiative garnered broad public backing throughout the Nigerian public owing to an alteration in public sentiment that is a non-institutional by product associated with the demonstration whilst Protesters and the Nigerian populace witnessed a surge in political consciousness.

In 2018, Daniel and Soule conducted an analysis of the extent of protest activity within the congressional districts. They showed how aware the general populace is of the social situation in their area and how protest activity there serves as an informative cue that influences how they vote. In short, protests that express liberal grievances tend to increase the proportion of votes cast for Democratic candidates; conversely, protests conservative causes increase the percentage of votes cast for Republican candidates. Furthermore, this study demonstrated that protest had a "vulnerability effect, "highlighting the inability of an incumbent politician to address constituent issues. This vulnerability effect encourages qualified candidates to run against incumbents in subsequent elections. Daniel & Soule (2018) concluded that two distinct kinds of protest impacts can have a significant influence on election results. First of all, it can inform voters on a subject, bring attention to important issues, and influence them to choose politicians whose policies and ideologies align with the complaints raised by protest. Second, protest actions can provide information that indicates to prospective rival candidates that the time is ripe for them to enter the race. Additionally, just as a person's social milieu shapes their level of political activity, citizens filter the information offered by protests via their ideological prisms and utilise this knowledge to inform their voting (Cho & RudoLPh 2008; Eulau 1986; Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995).

In line with the view of Valentim (2019), Protests have the potential to improve people's political participation in many contexts, such as election by giving people the impression that their input matters beyond what they previously believed. In an attempt to evaluate the influence of protest actions on election results, Klein & Melios (2021) found that counties with higher levels of Black Lives Matter protest activity exhibited a discernible shifting Democratic Party support during the 2020 U.S. election for the presidency.

In accordance with Cho & Rudolph's (2008), we may start switching emphasis towards national impact to local impact because citizens are increasingly willing to pay attention to what is occurring in their own neighbourhood in order to have a better grasp of it via casual observation. Which Baybeck & McClurg (2005) term the "the slow drip of everyday life" is moulded by observations. The basis for social education that helps citizens adjust their political choices is the social context in which they live (McPhee 1963; Sprague 1982). Local social environments shape citizens' priorities when it comes to politics (Eulau 1986; Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995) and this in turn shapes how they vote (Kenny 1992). Some have realised that by creating social networks and norms of engagement, the social environment can be used to organise potential voters and boost turnout (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995).In the words of Grober & Schram (2006), voting behaviour can even be increased by being aware of other people's acts in the community at large. Protest might alter the way the electorate views political candidates by bringing concerns to the forefront of politics (Soule & King 2006).It assists in illuminating the public about the specifics of a given problem.

A study carried out by Lee (2021), examines the possibility of local demonstrations having an impact on election results. In theoretical terms, protests may mould the public's view, attract enthusiastic backing for a cause, and spotlight a movement's relevance for a forthcoming election. However, the influence could fluctuate depending on parameters like the traits of the candidate and the type of protests that are organised. In His study, Ayiga (2021) examined the large-scale demonstrations against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad, or "End-SARS" protests. He noted that the demonstrations were inherently decentralized and consisted of a series of large-scale actions against the cruel treatment that Nigerian police officers were subjected to. He continued by saying that the demonstration got its starts in 2017 as a Twitter campaign calling for the dissolution of SARS with the hash tag #END-SARS. He contends that the Anti-SARS demonstrations throughout Nigeria constituted a microcosmic expression of the people's deep-seats discontent with the current State of affairs in their nation. Youths in Nigeria now had a platform to express their dissatisfaction, disappointment, and rage at the government thanks to the demonstration. The fundamental problems that fueled the revolt included cronyism, tribalism, insecurity, and corruption.

Additionally, Ochi & Mark (2021) conducted research on the End-SARS's influence. They declared that SARS is infamous for its cruelty, abuses of civil rights, and lack of responsibility for its deeds and that the protest cost the Nigerian economy billions of Naira. It emerged that the protest, which started peacefully but ultimately grew violent in some parts of the nation, had not only succeeded in its goal of dissolving SARS but also had significant non-institutional effects by bringing attention to the problem of police impunity in Nigeria on a global scale and raising public awareness of the need for responsible government and accountability in order to improve the country's economy. End-SARS left a lasting impression on the world community regarding the problems of police misconduct in Nigeria, in addition to the people and economy of Nigeria. Economic meltdowns have been a big issue, especially in third-world countries where

there are issues with industrialization, hunger, sickness, and high rates of unemployment, poverty, and illiteracy. Omokolade (who is cited in Ochi & Mark, 2021) claims that the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) African Department linked Nigeria's economic vulnerability to the civil instability that followed the nonviolent End-SARS rally. The Board attributed the nation's social instability and civil upheaval to both the nation's economic woes and Nigeria's lack luster growth prospects. The IMF emphasized that the nation is protesting not only against police violence but also against poverty and unemployment. The Department announced that the sequence of activities following the wake. The Department Stated that a number of events that followed Nigeria's oil price decline in 2015–16 created low economic prospects and negatively impacted citizens' standards of living, which in turn fueled the protest. Nevertheless, in light of all of this, there is still potential to develop the economy through the promotion of small businesses, which will go a long way toward boosting long-term economic development across the country by means of the creation of jobs, a decrease in the rate of unemployment and crime, amongst various social issues which are protest linked owing to an ailing economy.

Theoretical Framework
The Frankfurt School thinkers, notably the writers Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, as well as Theodor Adorno, developed the theoretical framework known as critical theory. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno are two excellent critical theory researchers. They clarified in their 1947 "Dialectic of Enlightenment" that the emergence of "pessimism" in the new critical theory regarding the likelihood of human liberation was caused by ambiguity about the foundations of social hegemony. This contradiction was ingrained in the past events surrounding the creation of the work, especially the growth of State capitalism, the culture industry, and Nazism as novel forms of social power that could not be articulated directly via conventional Marxist theory.

According to Adorno as well as Horkheimer, the conventional conflict between material-producing forces and Marxism's production relation was resolved by the State's economic intervention. A centralised planning system replaces the market, resulting in an unconscious process for distributing services and products, and this goes against Marx's forecast. Marx intended for the contradiction to usher in a revolutionary era, but instead it has given rise to despotism and fascism. According to Habermas, critical theory would therefore have nowhere to go when production forces reach a terrible reciprocal relationship with relations of production that were meant to be blasted wide open while lacking anything to act as appellant. For the two philosophers, this meant that they had to figure out how to explain the apparent ongoing dominance in the dearth of the contradiction, which the old critical theorists claimed constituted a source of hegemony in and of itself. The critical theory also portrays any philosophical stance that actively strives to establish a world centred around human needs and aims to free people from all types of oppression. This school of thought encompasses various philosophical perspectives, including but not limited to queer theory, feminism, post-structuralism,

and post-colonialism. A theory is crucial, according to Max Horkheimer, if it aims to free people from the conditions that hold them captive.

This theory is criticised for being too difficult to comprehend and not offering a concise political action. It is also accused of just being a review of the Marxist theory, by conventional Marxist- and Marxist-Leninist philosophers. Sometimes, also referred to as a gadfly to other systems it is seen as focused more on antagonising what is obtainable than attempting to bring about something novel (Wikipedia.org). Protests are products of the discontent of the people towards a particular situation. It refers to the act of expressing one's objection, dissent, or disapproval towards a particular idea action, policy, or situation in a bid to create a new world order by human needs as posited by critical theory. Protest tends to aim at impacting the personnel selection and the things that they do as opined by Verba & Nie (1972) in the same vein Meyer (2004) asserted that although protest is often viewed as anti-system to the extent that it amounts to a slight on peace and stability of the political sphere, this reflects the fact that protest is liberating in nature as it challenges the status quo.

The End-SARS protest just like every other protest attempted to liberate the people from the suffering and oppression that were being experienced in society as the special squad supposed to protect the rights of individuals started oppressing them, violating their human rights consequently, the youths who were the major victims of this oppression began to seek liberation from the enslavement they were subjected to by the members of the special squad and this occasioned End-SARS movement erupting into the End-SARS protest in a fight for liberation and they called for an end to SARS and good governance, a bid to create a society by their needs.

The Critical Theory framework serves as a pivotal lens for analyzing the End-SARS protest's impact on voter behaviour, political consciousness, party support, and electoral outcomes in Auchi during the 2023 general elections. Central to this framework is the concept of liberating individuals from oppressive circumstances, which resonates with the youth's response to the human rights abuses committed by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) that sparked the protests. This quest for liberation has significantly elevated political awareness among Auchi's youth, leading to increased voter registration and participation as they confronted systemic injustices and articulated a unified demand for change. It also, elucidates the shift in party support, viewing the protest as a collective repudiation of established political entities, specifically the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), perceived to perpetuate the oppressive status quo. The emergence of the Labour Party as a formidable alternative, propelled by the Obidient Movement, exemplifies Critical Theory's advocacy for reimagining social and political frameworks to better meet human needs and challenge prevailing hegemonies.

Moreover, the theory's emphasis on interrogating domination and transforming consciousness correlates with observed changes in voter behaviour, marking another

crucial variable in this analysis. The protest fostered a sense of unity across ethnic and religious divisions, galvanising youth involvement in the electoral process through voting, election monitoring, and calls for transparency. This shift in civic engagement echoes Horkheimer's assertion that Critical Theory aims to liberate individuals from oppressive conditions, transforming the ballot into an instrument for social and political emancipation.

Methodology
This academic inquiry employed the survey research design to accurately represent the entire parent population by selecting samples 356 from 141,931 (United Nations, 2020) population which consist of the inhabitants of Auchi in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. The fraction of the population utilised by the study is ascertained using the Taro Yamani sample size determination formula. This study utilises the random sampling method which ensures every element within the population has equal chances of being selected as part of the sample and this is deemed most suitable for a study of this nature as it guarantees the representativeness of the sample with respect to the broader population. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The questionnaires were administered to respondents so as to elicit information from them easily. The questionnaire applied is a closed-ended five-Likert scaled questionnaire, which serves as a structured tool for data gathering from study participants and possesses systematically designed questions aimed at addressing research questions in tandem with the research objectives with the following numbers attached to each scale strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and then strongly disagree (1). The questionnaire comprises two sections with the first section dealing with the biodata and the second section posing questions that aim at attaining the aims of the research.

Data Presentation
This section presents the responses of the respondents on the variables used to address the research objectives and test the hypotheses. The replies of the respondents to the indicators used to address the goals of the research and to investigate the hypotheses are shown in this part. When the mean score is above 3.00, the assertion is accepted while when below 3.00 we reject the assertion.

Table 1: Showing the Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	157	52.3%
Female	143	47.6%
Total	300	100%

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 1 above shows the gender of the respondents and from the table it can be seen that 157 respondents which represents 52.3% where males while 143 respondents representing 47.6 % of respondents where females.

Table 2: Showing the Age of the Respondents

Age of respondents	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	49	16.33%
26-35	231	77%
36-45	20	6.7%
Total	300	100%

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 2 shows the age range of the respondents and from the table it is presented that 49 respondents which amounts to 16.33% of the respondents fall within the age range of 18-25, 231 respondents which makes up 77% falls within the age range of 26-35 while 20 respondents which represents 6.7% falls under the age range of 36-45 and as such the respondent are youthful and meets the demographic criteria whose responses are vital to answering the research questions.

Table 3: Showing the Educational Qualification of the Respondents

Educational qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Ssce	8	2.6%
OND/NCE	176	58.6%
BSC/HND	102	34%
OTHERS	14	4.6%
TOTAL	300	100%

Source: Field survey 2025

The table 3 above displays the educational qualification of the respondents and as displayed it could be depicted that the 8 respondents representing 2.6% of the population are SSCE holders, 176 respondents representing 58.6% of the respondents are OND/NCE Certificate holders, 102 respondents which represents 34% respondents are BSC/HND certificate holder while 14 respondents representing 4.6% have other certificates and as such it implies that the respondents could easily understand the questions posed before them and could give informed responses to the questions.

Table 4: To Assess the Impact End-Sars Protest Had on Political Consciousness of the Youths.

N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	End-SARS drew the attention of the citizenry especially the youths on pressing political issues	17	204	79	0	0	3.79	0.53	Affirmed
2	The End-SARS protest made the youth take the center stage in the discus of the 2023 general election	51	189	60	0	0	3.97	0.61	Affirmed
3	The End-SARS protest led to the increase in voters' registration amongst the youth towards the 2023 general elections	82	218	0	0	0	4.27	0.45	Affirmed
4	The End-SARS protest led to the increase in contest for elective positions by the youths	64	205	31	0	0	4.11	0.55	Affirmed

Source: Field Survey by the Researcher (2025)

Table 4; Espoused response of the respondents, on the Impact of the End-SARS Protest on the Political Consciousness of the Youths, in Auchi. All indicators possessed a mean score of 3.00 and above, hence all assertions were accepted, and as such, End-SARS had an impact on the political consciousness of the youth. It helped in drawing the attention of the youths to the pressing political issues, which led to an increase in the exercise of franchise by the youths in terms of registration of youths for voting exercise and also the contest of elective positions by the youths. The protest also led to the issues involving the youth to be at the front burner in the discus of national issues as it became obvious, that the youths have been left out of politics and are been mistreated in the society which they are the leaders of its future.

Table 5: Examining the Impact of the End-SARS Protest on Political Party Support.

N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	The End-SARS protest made the issues concerning the youth salient in the campaign by political parties towards the 2023 general election in a bid to gain the support of the youths	84	127	89	0	0	3.98	0.76	Affirmed
2	The End-SARS protest contributed to the involvement of youths in campaign process both on social media and off social media	97	203	0	0	0	4.32	0.47	Affirmed
3	The End-SARS contributed to the growth in support of parties outside the two traditionally dominant parties, towards the 2023 general election	53	222	14	9	2	4.05	0.63	Affirmed
4	The End-SARS protest was instrumental in the growth of a competitive third force party in the national politics which was augmented by the clamor for good governance by the youths	51	217	32	0	0	4.06	0.52	Affirmed

Source: Field Survey by the Researcher (2025)

Table 5; depicts the perception of the respondents, on the Impact of the End-SARS Protest on Political Party Support in Auchi. All the items had a mean score of 3.0 and above, hence they were all accepted. Thus, the respondents affirmed that there was an Impact of the End-SARS Protest on Political Party Support in Auchi, because as a result of the End-SARS the issues concerning the youths, became a salient campaign message by political parties as they scamper for the support of the youths of which this assisted political parties gain the involvement of the youths in campaign process both on and off social media, and this activity eventually leads to the rise in support of parties outside the traditionally dominant parties, which were now seen as belonging to the oppressors giving room for the rise of a third force party which was highly competitive as reflected in the results of the 2023 general elections.

Table 6: Examining the Impact of the End-SARS Protest on Voters' Behaviour

N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	S.D	Remarks
1	The End-SARS led to the turnout of youthful voters on the day of election.	62	204	34	0	0	4.09	0.56	Affirmed
2	Majority of the Youths who were politically awaken by the End-SARS voted for political parties outside the traditionally dominant parties	90	146	64	0	0	4.09	0.71	Affirmed
3	The End-SARS led to the electorates especially the youths to actively monitor the process of vote coalition	51	186	63	0	0	3.96	0.62	Affirmed
4	The End-SARS enabled voters especially the youths to confidently engage in the voting process	64	206	30	0	0	4.10	0.56	Affirmed

Source: Field Survey by the Researcher (2025)

Table 6; shows the Perception of the Respondents on the Impact of the End-SARS on Voters Behaviour in Auchi. All the items had a mean score of 3.0 and above, hence assertions were all accepted. Thus, the respondents affirmed that the End-SARS protests impacted the behaviour of voters. The respondents attested to the fact that as a result of the End-SARS, there was a turnout of youthful voters on the day of the election, and a majority of the youths, were politically awakened, as a result of the End-SARS protest and voted, against the traditional dominant parties and this is not farfetched from, the opinion that these parties' way of handling governance led to the issues which the End-SARS erupted from. This table also displays the position of the respondents that the protest led to the protection of votes and active monitoring of the coalition process by electorates, especially the youths, and the youths were confidently engaged in the voting process due to the confidence based on the unison that has been attained through the End-SARS protest.

Table 7: identifying how the End-SARS protest influenced the outcome of the 2023 general election (presidential election) in Auchi

S/N	Political party AND CANDIDATE	Number of votes attained
1	ACCORD PARTY	06
2	ACTION ALLIANCE	1
3	AFRICAN ACTION CONGRESS	4
4	AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS	36
5	ACTION DEMOCRATIC PARTY	09
6	ALL PROGRESSSIVE CONGRESS	12,916
7	ALL PROGRESSIVE GRAND ALLIANCE	09
8	ALLIED PEOPLES MOVEMENT	1
9	ACTION PEOPLES PARTY	0
10	BOOT PARTY	12
11	LABOUR PARTY	9764
12	NEW NIGERIA PEOPLES PARTY	04
13	NATIONAL RESCUE MOVEMENT	14
14	PEOPLES DEMOCRATICPARTY	5636
15	PEOPLES REDEMPTIONPARTY	01
16	SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY	0
17	YOUNG PROGRESSIVE PARTY	0
18	ZENITH LABOUR PARTY	32
	TOTAL	28,445

Source: https://inecnigeria.org/

As seen from the pictures above the results of the 2023 general election (presidential) in the four wards in Auchi was dominated by the All Progressive Congress which polled a total of 12916 votes which amounts to 45.4 percent of valid votes casted from the four wards in Auchi wards and was followed by the labour party which polled a total of 9764 votes which amounts to 34.3 percent of valid votes casted in Auchi whilst the people democratic party polled a total of 5636 votes which represents 19.8 percent of valid votes casted for the presidential election in Auchi and this growth of the Labour Party is also reflected in the results that was attained at the State as displayed in the pictures above. As observed from the pictures in the 2019 presidential election was a two horse race which was between the all progressive congress and the people's democratic party and as seen above for the state result the people's democratic party polled the highest number of votes in the election with 275,619 votes amounting for 49.17% of valid votes casted in Edo state while the APC got a total of 267842 votes making 47.77% of valid votes casted in Edo State while the combination of other political parties got 16965 which amounts for 3.035% of valid votes casted and in this presidential election the labour part polled just 54 votes which represented 0.07 % of the valid votes casted in Edo state for the presidential election but in the last presidential election they do State result revealed that the labour

party performed astronomically as the party polled a total of 194426 votes representing 71.35% of votes casted in Edo State while the APC attained 37728 votes representing 13.84% of valid votes casted while the People's Democratic Party which polled the highest number of votes came third with 31187 votes representing 11.445 of valid votes casted and other political parties attained 9166 votes representing 3.36 percent of the votes casted and this astronomical feat attained by the Labour Party was achieve dues to the galvanised support the labour party received from the obedient movement which was a product of the End-SARS movement and this cements the position of Mokuye et al (2023) that the End-SARS was the precursor to the Obidient Movement as many people who partook in this protest moved their structures to the new movement. Most of the actors during the 2020 protest queued behind Peter Obi, whom they hope will meet their aspirations of a meaningful economic and political transformation of the Country when he becomes president.

This is also consistent with the position that the obedient movement entailed activists who have not forgiven the political class for the role in the botched End-SARS protest particularly the killing at the lekki toll gate and the obi candidacy was their opportunity to get back at those politicians who unleashed the military on unarmed Nigerians and massacred them across the country. In same vain Okwelum (2023) States that "the 'Obidient movement' was triggered way back by the 'End-SARS protests' that gave birth to 'a new Nigeria'. It was a protest in which the Nigerian youths called out police brutality to be addressed" "One of the outcomes of the protests was youths' dissatisfaction with the status quo and their resolve to take over the instrument of government through the ballot and to engineer for youthful representations at all levels of government" and this movement led to the massive support attained by the presidential candidate of the labour party as he was seen as the candidate for the youths who felt he would be able to as president meet the needs and attain the aspirations of the youths. "The End-SARS protest is one typical example of an expression of the feeling that the people were tired of the political system and needed to draw the attention of the government to their plight, under the guise of "End Police Brutality". It was an outcry expressing displeasure, discomfort, loss of faith and trust in the Nigerian State; a pointer to the very fact that Nigerians were no longer comfortable with the government and decided to let their feelings known.

Table 8: This Presents the Correlation Analysis Output from SPSS 23

Correlation

		END-SARS_AND_POLITICAL_PARTY_CONSCIOUSNESS_OF_YOUTHS	END-SARS_AND_POLITICAL_PARTY_SUPPORT	END-SARS_AND_VOTERS_BEHAVIOUR
END-SARS_AND_POLITICAL_PARTY_CONSCIOUSNESS_OF_YOUTHS	Pearson Correlation	1	.083	.214**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.153	.000
	N	300	300	300
END-SARS_AND_POLITICAL_PARTY_SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	.083	1	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.153		.000
	N	300	300	300
END-SARS_AND_VOTERS_BEHAVIOUR	Pearson Correlation	.214**	.710**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	300	300	300

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS 23

Most Nigerians have attributed this displeasure expressed by the youth against the government to the massive call for change and the subsequent support for candidates that can redeem the country from her present economic and political quagmire or woes in the post-COVID-19 era. Mr Peter Obi and his running mate Ahmed Datti received 'massive support' from the youth via a movement popularly called 'ObiDient Movement' or the 'ObiDatti movement', as some have called it. Besides these candidates, some views suggested that the electorates were gunning for credible candidates for whom they found confidence, all in a bid to produce young and vibrant persons to man the affairs of the country." (Mokwugo, 2023) and this gives an explanation as to why the votes garnered by other political parties increased.

Testing Hypothesis

This section presents, the result generated from the correlation analysis on SPSS in other to accept or reject the hypothesis of this study Stated in page 4. The Pearson Correlation Rule States that Pearson's r varies between +1 and -1, where +1 is a perfect positive correlation, and -1 is a perfect negative correlation. 0 means there is no linear correlation at all. We shall also consider the P-value which indicates the level of significance. A P-value less than 0.05 imply significance and that of less than 0.01 implies high significance. Therefore p=0.0000 implies high significance.

On the relationship between the End-SARS protest and the political consciousness of the youth at Auchi, as shown in Table 4 above, the result of the correlation analysis displays the Pearson Correlation is at +1 which means there is a perfect positive correlation level and the significant value is .000 in other words there is a relationship between the End-SARS Protest and the consciousness of the youth which is significant as such the hypothesis that there is a relationship between End-SARS protest and political party support at Auchi is adopted.

The output of the SPSS correlation analysis displayed on Table 4 reveals that the Pearson Correlation is at 1 which means the correlation level is strongly positive and the significant level as displayed is 0.001 and as such there is a good level of significance. Therefore, there the correlation between End-SARS and Political Party Support at Auchi, is significant as such the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the End-SARS Protest and the consciousness of the youth in Etsako West Local Government Area is adopted. On the relationship between the End-SARS Protest and voters' behaviour in Auchi, Table 4 reveals that the result of the Pearson correlation analysis is +1 which indicates a positive correlation and the significance value is at 0.001 which indicates a high significance level which implies that the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the End-SARS protest and voters' behaviour at Auchi, is accepted.

Discussion of Findings
The End-SARS protests ignited the spirit of unity among Nigerian youths irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or political affiliations. Even before and after independence, religious and ethnic differences have been the major sources of debilitation in Nigeria. Ugba & Linus (2021) asserted that The End-SARS protests overcame those primordial sentiments. As observed by George & Bennet (2005), individuals and groups of people may be able to effect significant changes in social policy and structures, when they transcend customary boundaries. That was achieved by youths across Nigeria. They overcame primordial sentiments to resist injustice and exploitation by the SARS. Similarly, Ochi & Mark (2021) claimed that the nationwide End-SARS protests organised by young people overcame the country's religious, ethnic, and political barriers and sought an end to police abuses, especially the dissolution of the discredited Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (FSARS) Regardless of their political, religious, or ethnic backgrounds, Nigerian youngsters were united by the End-SARS protests. Religious and ethnic divisions have been the main causes of debilitation in Nigeria both before and after independence. Based on Ugba & Linus (2021), the Anti-SARS demonstrations triumphed over those innate emotions.

Ritzer (2000) noted that when groups or individuals of people go beyond conventional boundaries, they could potentially be able to significantly alter societal policies and structures. And it was accomplished by young people all around Nigeria. They overcame innate emotions to oppose unfairness and the SARS's use of them. Similarly, Ochi & Mark (2021) asserted that the country's End-SARS rallies, spearheaded by youth, broke down political, religious, and racial barriers in order to demand a halt to police

abuses, particularly the disbandment of the SARA and this explains why from the data analysed, it is affirmed that with respect to the impact of the End-SARS protest on the political consciousness of the youths in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, the protest drew the attention of the citizenry, especially the youths on pressing political issues, made the youths take the central stage in the discus of the 2023 General Election, which eventually led to the mobilisation of the youths in the registration for voters card toward the elections and the increase in the number of the youths who contested for elective positions.

As regards, impact of this protest on the support of political parties, the End-SARS made issues concerning the youths' salient, as political parties during their campaigns made lofty promises to the youths, in other to gain their support towards the general election and this contributed to the support of the youths, in both on and off social media. This also contributed to the growth in support of political parties, outside traditionally dominant political parties, the All Progressive Congress and the People's Democratic Party, as they were somewhat perceived, to have occasioned the systemic and institutional decay in the society which led to the violation of human rights that resulted in the protest and this, further led to the growth of a competitive "third force party", which was the Labor Party in the national politics.

As a product of the data analysed, we could also see that there was an impact of the End-SARS protest on the behaviour of voters, as the protest enabled the youths to confidently engage in the voting process, as the End-SARS gave them a sense of responsibility in the determination of the trajectory of the nation. It also led to the turnout of youth voters, on the day of the election as they were eager to put the End-SARS on the ballot as advised by activists who were actively involved in the build-up and eventuality of the protest. There was also an increased level of monitoring of the voting process, and collation process by the electorates, especially the youths to ensure that their votes were counted, and many of the youths whose political consciousness were awakened by the End-SARS, voted for other parties outside the dominant APC and PDP as a way of protest, against the political establishment and prebend of certain political elites.

Lastly from the secondary source of data gathered we could see that the outcome of the election was influenced by the End-SARS protest and this position is justified because the End-SARS protest led to a level of political consciousness of the youths who make up to 70 of the population and as such had the demographic strength to influence the election coupled with the fact that the End-SARS protest in Auchi just like every other local protest helps to furnish the local populace with information and this information helps the people in decision making. The End-SARS as attested to was According to mokuye et al (2023) the precursor to the Obidient Movement as many people who partook in this protest moved their structures to the new movement. Most of the actors during the 2020 protest queued behind Peter Obi, whom they hope will meet their aspirations of a meaningful economic and political transformation of the Country when he becomes president. And as result of the support gotten by peter obi a candidate of the labour party

towards the 2023 general election, he has able to attain the level of a third force which contested heavily for power and as displayed in the results from the presidential election he came third during the elections.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the primary objective of this study was to examine the effect of the End-SARS protest on voters' behaviour and electoral outcomes in the 2023 general elections in Auchi, Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. The findings revealed that the End-SARS protest significantly influenced the political consciousness of the youth, altered patterns of party support, and reshaped voting behaviour within the study area.The analysis established that the End-SARS movement heightened political awareness among youths, who constitute the largest demographic group in Nigeria and, consequently, in Auchi. Consistent with the arguments of Banaszak & Anderson (2016) and Crabtree & Fraga (2021), protest activities such as End-SARS drew public attention to pressing political issues and increased youth participation in governance processes. This was further reflected in the surge in voter registration among youths, as confirmed by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and in the growing number of young candidates who contested elective positions.

Furthermore, the protest influenced political party support as parties sought to appeal to the mobilised youth population by incorporating youth related issues in their campaign narratives and through active engagement on both physical and digital platforms. The protest also led to a shift in voter allegiance, with many voters expressing dissatisfaction with the long-standing dominance of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP). This shift resulted in increased support for emerging parties such as the Labour Party (LP) and the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP). The Labour Party, in particular, emerged as a competitive third force party in the 2023 general elections, marking a significant development in Nigeria's democratic evolution. The findings further indicated that the End-SARS protest served as a catalyst for the Obidient Movement, which in turn shaped voter attitudes and reduced electoral apathy. The renewed political consciousness fostered through the protest translated into greater voter engagement, active monitoring of the electoral process, and a collective demand for transparency. The youth driven participation that followed, symbolised a move toward a more vibrant and participatory democratic culture in Nigeria.

Recommendations
1. Protest reflects the dissatisfaction of the people. It is a method employed in showcasing the opinion of the public. Elections also are seen as a way through which public dissatisfaction against the government can be expressed, in terms of voting against the incumbent government. This would lead to the incumbent government and party suffering significant dents in its popularity making re-election costly.
2. Opposition Political parties that intend to take over power should endeavour to capitalise on the unity of the citizenry beyond primordial sentiments especially,

the youths' as they are favoured in terms of demography which is relevant to the democratic dispensation practiced in Nigeria.

3. The youths should continue in the political education of the citizenry, and continue the embrace one another as Nigerians, moving beyond the sentiments of religion, ethnicity, tribalism, regionalism, and party politics, in their drive to attain good governance, that would be youth-oriented, meeting the needs of the youngsters with involvement of the younger generation in governance.

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