



## **Police Accountability in the Post-ENDSARS Protest: Perceptions of Youths in Southeast, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Accountability has remained a recurring concept in policing particularly within context of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). It was issues associated with perceived police unaccountability that led to the public outcry and protest organised by the Nigerian youths in October 2020 tagged 'ENDSARS Protest', to demand for a more accountable police force and an end to police brutality against Nigerian citizens. Years after the protest, nothing seems to be known about the changes or progress in the level of police accountability particularly in Southeast Nigeria. This study therefore investigated the perception of youths in Southeast Nigeria, regarding police accountability in the post ENDSARS protest. The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The sample size for the study was 400 respondents who age between 17 years to 41 years, who voluntarily participated in the study. Data for the study were collected through web-based questionnaire administration and data collected were processed using the SPSS software package. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and data analysed were presented using table and charts. The study hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using the multinomial logistic regression model in order to determine the influence covariates including gender, educational level and place of residence on respondents' perception of police accountability in the post ENDSARS protest. Findings of the study revealed that the respondents perceived a less effort on the part of the police force to address the accountability issues within the NPF which triggered the ENDSARS protest in 2020. Result of the hypothesis test suggests that the three predictor variables included in the multinomial logistic model were not statistically significant. The study therefore recommended that communities and stakeholders in should mount more pressure on the federal government to establish independent agency to monitor the activities of the police officers deployed in the various parts of the country, particularly in Southeast zone of Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Police, Accountability, Post-ENDSARS, Protest, Youths



## **Introduction**

Accountability has remained a recurring concept in policing. This is considering the fact that the police force is placed with the role of security of lives and properties – a strategic role that no other institution of the government may be able to handle (Alemika, 2010). Police accountability is equally very important considering the fact that policing is a social contract between the police force and members of the society. As such, the police are expected to show a high level of accountability, transparency and integrity in their various operations, since much of their duties bother on issues of human rights protection.

Police accountability therefore ensures that police officers perform their duties with utmost diligence and professional conduct. However, police accountability has remained a problem not only in developing nations' policing organisations, but cut across different national police forces within the developed nations. However, issue of police accountability has been a major focus in developing nations particularly in Nigeria due to the structural foundations that led to the institutionalisation of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF). According to Alemika (2003), the current structure of the NPF could be linked to the colonial structures which instituted the force as a colonial repressive or coercive mechanism against the citizens. Consequently, even after many years of independence from colonial powers, the structure of the NPF has failed to assume significant changes in terms of organisational performance, accountability and efficiency. Thus, the NPF and Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) in particular has over the years been attributed with poor accountability, unlawful arrest and detention, extortion, dehumanisation,



repressiveness, extra-judicial killing and high level of corrupt practices, among others (Ekwunife, Oparah, Akpan & Thomas, 2021; Salaudeen, 2018).

Over the past few years, the observed inconsistencies within the NPF have led to public outcries and various legislations targeted at reforming and repositioning the force in line global practices. However, many of such reforms failed to yield desirable outcomes. The peak of the public outcry was however observed in October 2020 during a national wide protest tagged “END SARS PROTEST”, which was led by the youths in various cities within States in Nigeria. The protest was initially targeted against the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (an anti-robbery unit within the NPF) (Ekwunife et al, 2021), but later escalated to general issues of police unaccountability and bad governance, calling for the government to address issues affecting police accountability.

Although the protest was hut following an acclaimed bloody onslaught against the protesters at Lekki tow gate in Lagos State, Nigeria, by the Military and the NPF, a series of changes were observed within the NPF which included the disbandment of the SARS and creation of another special police unit named SWAT. Considering the series of dramatic events that have happened since the ENDSARS protest, it is expected that there would be significant improvement in police officers’ behavioural conducts, as well as the overall organisational structure of the NPF, which would increase their level of accountability. However, it is yet unclear how much changes in terms of police accountability that have occurred as a result of the ENDSARS protest. This is mainly due to the fact that significant research effort has not been placed on the theme of police accountability within the post ENDSARS protest, even though few researches have



investigated the outcome of the ENDSARS protest on other dimensions (Ekwunife et al., 2021; Ochi & Mark, 2021). Thus, a knowledge gap exists in relation to the topic of the current research which needs to be empirically investigated.

Assessing how much improvement that has been made since the ENDSARS protest is a significant step towards assessing progress in police reform agenda of the federal government, which would also ensure that proper policies are determined to reposition the NPF to a better police force that would guarantee accountability of police officers' operations, respect to rule of law and human rights.

### **Objective of the Study**

The current research seeks to assess the perception of youths regarding police accountability within the post ENDSARS protest, with the view to recommend policy strategies that could help to improve the accountability of the police within the context of Southeast Nigeria.

### **Hypothesis**

Respondents' perception about police accountability in the post ENDSARS protest is significantly influenced by their gender, level of educational attainment and place of residence.



## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Accountability and Police Accountability**

Accountability constitutes one of the foundations of democracy and rule of law. It places a responsibility on organizations to acquire the necessary ability to perform; the obligation to provide information, explanations and/or justifications and the necessity to absorb the consequences of unaccountable actions including disciplinary measures (Igbuzor, 2010). Mark (2003) also averred that accountability is tied to the notion of responsibility with regards to political, moral or legal liability for harmful results or particular behaviour.

Police accountability has been given a lot of attention by different scholars across the globe. This is based on the important position to which the police in any society occupy for the well-being and maintenance of social order in the society. It is also important to note that police accountability is the bedrock for the legitimacy of the police force in any society, public confidence, trust and loyalty (Alemika, 2010). In situations where the police are perceived to be unaccountable, public confidence, trust, loyalty and public cooperation are marred and this makes the police duty difficult and risky.

Hence police accountability refers to the ability of police officers to account for their actions in the bid to fulfilling their statutory obligations as security agents with integrity, impartiality and in tandem with public interest (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2011). It also involves holding both individual police officers, as well as law enforcement agencies responsible for effectively delivering basic services of crime control and maintaining order, while treating individuals fairly and within the bounds of



law. This view is the same with Olusola and Osunyikanmi (2012), who opined that police accountability, is concerned with holding police officers responsible for their actions and inactions and for effective performance of their primary duties of crime prevention and control while at the same time treating individuals fairly and within the confine of the law.

United Nations (2011) Handbook on police accountability, oversight and integrity also defined police accountability as a system of internal and external checks and balances aimed at ensuring that police carry out their duties properly and are held responsible if they fail to do so. Such a system is meant to uphold police integrity and deter misconduct and to restore or enhance public confidence in policing. Accordingly, the police are required to be answerable on their exercise of powers, in what they do, their performance, management and conduct of police officers with regards to the lawful, respectful and equal treatment of citizens.

### **Importance of Police Accountability for Effective policing**

The impact of accountability on police effectiveness, professionalism and overall cooperation with the public in the discharge of the arduous responsibility to maintain safety and security of the citizens and state, cannot be overemphasized. This is because; police accountability does not only strengthen and give credibility to the police in its conducts, performance and management, but also legitimacy in the eyes of the public and a restoration of public trust (Goldsmith, 2005).



Police accountability is the fulcrum for effective policing. Without effective accountability and oversight mechanisms, the police are likely to succumb to partisan interferences to the detriment of democratic governance and economic development. This reason for this was provided by Goldstein as cited in Alemika (2003, p. 47) who noted that,

The police, by the very nature of their function, are an anomaly in a free society. They are invested with a great deal of authority under a system of government in which authority is reluctantly granted, and when granted, sharply curtailed. The specific form of their authority – to arrest, to search, to detain, and to use force – is awesome in the degree to which it can be disruptive of freedom, invasive of privacy, and sudden and direct in its impact upon individual.

Thus, if the powers of the police are not controlled and subjected to mechanisms of accountability, the rights and freedom of citizens can be jeopardized (Alemika, 2003; Olusola & Osunyikanmi, 2012). Bayley (2002) and Harris (2005) corroborated that effective police accountability is vital to the achievement of the goals of policing; law enforcement agencies that reduce problematic officer behavior through mechanisms of checking individual police excesses, will enjoy greater trust among citizens and, as a result, will receive greater cooperation from citizens in programs designed to reduce crime and disorder. Hence, holding individual police officers accountable for their conduct is an essential element of policing. It is directly and indirectly related to achieving the basic goals of policing: reducing crime and disorder, enhancing the quality of neighborhood life, and providing fair, respectful and equal treatment for all people.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Symbolic Interactionist Theory**

Symbolic Interactionism (SI) is one of the micro theoretical perspectives in sociology. It was developed in United State based on the works of George H. Mead (1863-1931) and



Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929). This theory is based on the premise of how individuals construct their social world in the course of their social interactions and everyday life experience; to which they share symbolic meanings among themselves and attach same meanings to the events around them (Lindsey & Beach, 2002). As a social constructionist perspective in the analysis of social events, it has the potential of providing insight on the policies which members of a community consider as appropriate in addressing problems affecting them within their social milieus.

Symbolic interactionism assumes that all larger structures of the society are nothing more than the actions of interacting people and that they can be changed. Hence, people do not respond directly to the world around them, but rather to the meaning they collectively apply to them (Blummer, 1969 in Lindsey & Beach, 2002). Hence, the meanings to which individuals attach to social events determine the actions and importance to which they attach to such events. According to Lindsey and Beach (2002), individuals do not respond to their environment rather, they respond to the meanings to which they ascribe to social events through their collective sharing of meanings through symbols. Through human interactions within their milieus, they determine what is important and what not important for them. For instance, when individuals have the perception that the police are used only for oppression, construct it within their minds and share it among them, such will be prevalent among them until the individuals, through their social interactions change that meaning attached to it. Hence, reality is socially constructed i.e., subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe and not just what is objectively true especially based on their experiences within their environments (Crossman, 2010).





In relation the theme of the present study, it therefore goes that the perceptions of youths towards police accountability may be a product of shared views acquired through their social interactions and experiences as members of a community. In other words, the direction of public perception (either negative or positive) towards police accountability may be a product of shared feelings among themselves based on the experiences they have with police officers. Negative perceptions of the police by the people means that their experiences with the police force are not favourable while positive perceptions signify that they have favourable experiences with the police force. Consequently, their perceptions could serve as indicators to policy measures that could be employed to address areas of gaps in police accountability. In other words, their perceptions could reflect their general feelings regarding what they expect from the police force and how such expectations could be achieved.

## **Methods**

This study employed the descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The design was chosen in consideration of its flexibility in generating reliable data within a very short time frame in such a way that enabled the researcher to quantitatively describe the current situation with regards to the study theme and allowed the researcher an opportunity to use a sample to study the characteristics of a larger population at a point in time and at a relatively lower cost. The study was conducted in the Southeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The area is located between latitudes  $04^{\circ}17'$  N and  $07^{\circ}06'$  N and longitudes  $05^{\circ}23'$  E and  $09^{\circ}28'$  E (Dimelu, Ozioko, Madukwe & Eze, 2014). The area consists of the following States: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. However, three



States in including Abia and Anambra State were selected to represent all the States in the region. Being an Igbo ethnic group, people within the area are mainly Igbo speaking people. However, there is mix of people from various ethnic groups who migrated to the area. People within the region are predominantly engaged in various socio-economic activities including farming, commerce, industry, education, hospitality and other major occupational ventures.

The researcher utilized the Google Form platform in designed a web-based questionnaire, which was administered to 400 youths through a social media platforms including Whatsapp, Facebook and Telegram. 10 social media groups comprising of youths were purposively selected by the researcher (five groups in each of the two selected States). Thereafter, the researcher reached out to the administrators of groups and sought their permission and help in sharing the questionnaire link to members of their groups. After gaining their permissions, the questionnaire link was shared to each of the selected groups, while the group administrators also helped in explaining the details of the questionnaire link. Since participation was voluntary, a total of 502 responses were received within the target time frame, which was more than the required sample size. Consequently, the first 400 instances of the submitted questionnaire copies were used for analysis.

Data contained in the Google Form Excel Spreadsheet were transformed into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) data. Thereafter, the SPSS used to process all the needed statistical data. However, the actual data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics including frequency count and percentages. The data analysed were



presented in tables and charts. The study hypothesis was however tested at 0.05 level of significance using multinomial logistic regression.

## Findings

**Table 1.**

*Summary of Respondents' Socio-Demographic Variables*

<b>Socio-Demographic Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	198	49.6
Female	176	44.0
Prefer not to say	26	6.4
Total	400	100.0
<b>Age Categories</b>		
17 - 21 Years	70	17.6
22 - 26 Years	147	36.8
27 - 31 Years	74	18.4
32 - 36 Years	67	16.8
37 - 41 Years	42	10.4
Total	400	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	310	77.6
Married	90	22.4
Total	400	100.0
<b>Education</b>		
Primary School	64	16.0
Secondary School	42	10.4
Tertiary (Diploma Level)	176	44.0
Tertiary (Bachelors Degree)	118	29.6
Total	400	100.0
<b>Place of Residence</b>		
Urban	291	72.8
Semi-urban	86	21.6
Rural	22	5.6
Total	400	100.0
<b>Occupation</b>		
Self-employed	90	22.5
Professional/Government Official	6	2.5
Artisan	29	7.3



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Students	154	37.5
Unemployed	115	28.8
Others	6	1.5
Total	400	100.0

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Table 1 contains information on the analysis conducted on the responses obtained in relation to respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. Data in the table shows that slightly higher proportion (49.6%) of males participated in the study compared to 44.0% of females. The data equally showed that the respondents aged between the minimum ages of 17 years to the maximum age of 41 years, with those who aged between 22-26 years constituting the largest proportion (36.8%) within the sample. This confirms in essence that youths are the target population for this study. Data analysis equally showed that quite a majority (77.6%) of the respondents were single compared to a very lower proportion (22.4%) of them who were married. Again, this is consistent with their age demographic above which showed that they are actually youths. Data analysis also showed that the highest proportion (44.0%) of the respondents in our sample had completed up to the diploma certificate level, while about a quarter proportions (29.6%) of them indicated having completed the bachelor's degree certificate level of education. The largest proportion (72.8%) of the respondents indicated being residents within the urban areas in Southeast Nigeria, followed by 21.6% of them who indicated being residents within the semi-urban areas, while the least proportion (5.6%) of the samples indicated being resident within the rural communities. Last on the socio-demographics, data analysis showed that majority (38.4%) of the respondents indicated being students. This was followed by about a quarter proportions (28.8%) of them who indicated being unemployed, while the least proportion (2.5%) of them indicated being professionals/government officials.



**Table 2.**

*Summary of Respondents' Perception about Police Accountability in the Post ENDSARS protest*

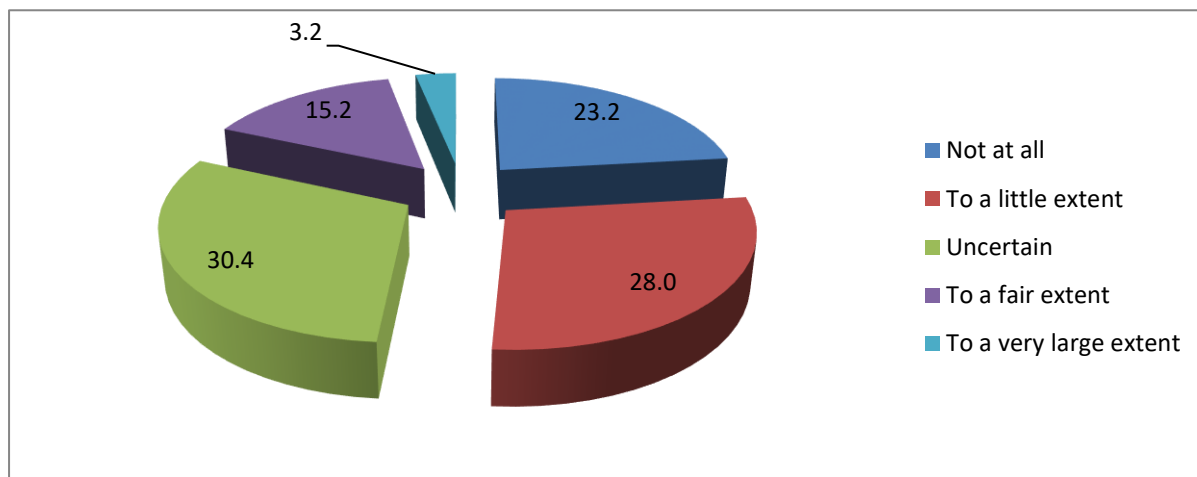
<b>Description of Items</b>	<b>Response Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Perceived Police Accountability with regards to Protecting People's lives and Properties	Completely Unaccountable	102	25.5
	Unaccountable	134	33.5
	Uncertain	77	19.3
	Fairly Accountable	64	16.0
	Very Accountable	23	5.8
	Total	400	100.0
Respondents' Perception of Police Accountability in Terms of Preventing Occurrences of Crime since the ENDSARS protest	Yes	29	7.2
	No	246	61.6
	Maybe	45	11.2
	I can't certainly say	80	20.0
	Total	400	100.0
Respondents' Perception of Police Accountability in terms of Securing Justice for Individuals	Certainly Yes	7	1.8
	To some extent	147	36.8
	Not at all	246	61.5
	Total	400	100.0
Respondents' Perception of Police Accountability in terms of Maintenance of Law and Order	Yes	29	7.2
	No	262	65.6
	Not Certain	109	27.2
	Total	400	100.0
Respondents' Perception of Police Accountability in relation to Respect for Human Rights	Significantly improved	6	1.5
	Just slight improvement	141	35.3
	Nothing has changed/about the same	186	46.5
	Worse	64	16.0
	Sub-Total	397	99.3
	Missing System	3	0.8
	Total	400	100.0
How true is it that the Nigeria Police Force has become very strict in holding police officers accountable for misconducts since the ENDSARS protest?	Completely False	58	14.5
	False	141	35.3
	Neutral	86	21.5
	Somewhat True	77	19.3
	Very true	32	8.0
	Sub-Total	394	98.6
	Missing System	6	1.5
Total	400	100.0	



The respondents were obliged to express their perception regarding police accountability with respect protecting the lives and properties of the people. Findings as presented in table 2 showed that the highest proportion (33.5%) of the respondents perceived that the police are yet 'unaccountable' towards the protection of lives and properties of the people even in the aftermath of the ENDSARS saga. Quite a significant proportion (61.6%) of the respondents were of the perception that the police have not shown any significant improvement in their level of accountability with regards to preventing the occurrences of criminal activities in the aftermath of the ENDSARS protest. Data analysed in table 2 equally showed that majority (61.5%) of the respondents ticked the option 'not at all' – which implies that they were of the perception that the police have not become accountable at all in terms of securing justice for individuals in the aftermath of the ENDSARS protest. Data analysis equally showed that majority (65.6%) of the respondents equally expressed the perception that the NPF has not shown significant improvements in their level of accountability with respect to the maintenance of law and order.

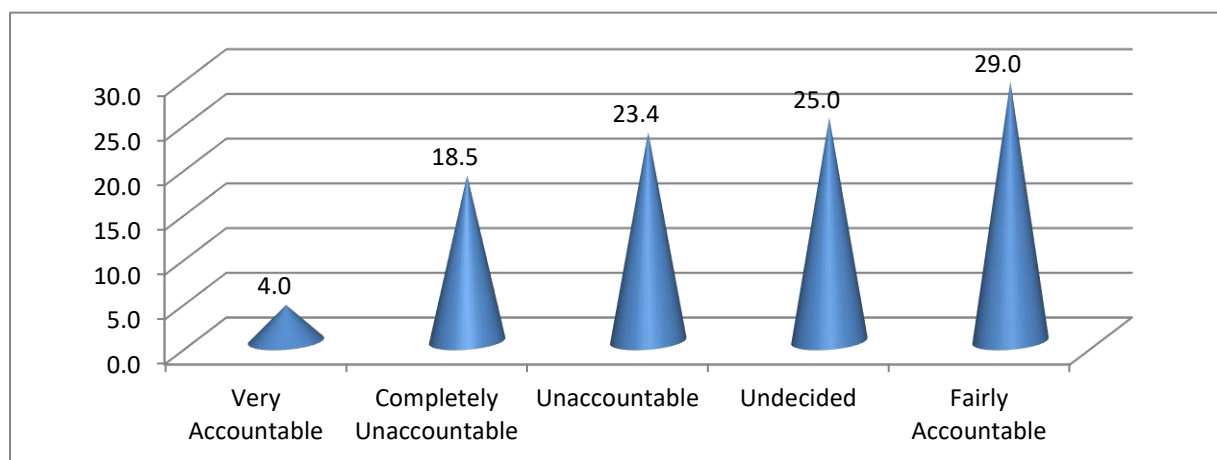
Data analysis also showed that close to half proportion (46.5%) of the respondents perceived that 'nothing has changed or that things are about the same' with respect to police accountability in relation to respect for human rights since the end of the ENDSARS protest in Nigeria. About a quarter proportion (35.3%) of them perceived that there is just slight improvement, while 16.0% of them perceived that the police force were becoming worse in their accountability level with respect to respect for human rights in the aftermath of the ENDSARS protest. Furthermore, the largest proportion (35.3%) of the respondents perceived it as being 'false' with regards to the view that the NPF has

become very strict in holding its police officers accountable for misconducts since the ENDSARS protest. However, 21.5% of them remained 'neutral' in that regard, while only a lower proportion (8.0%) of them considered it as being very true.



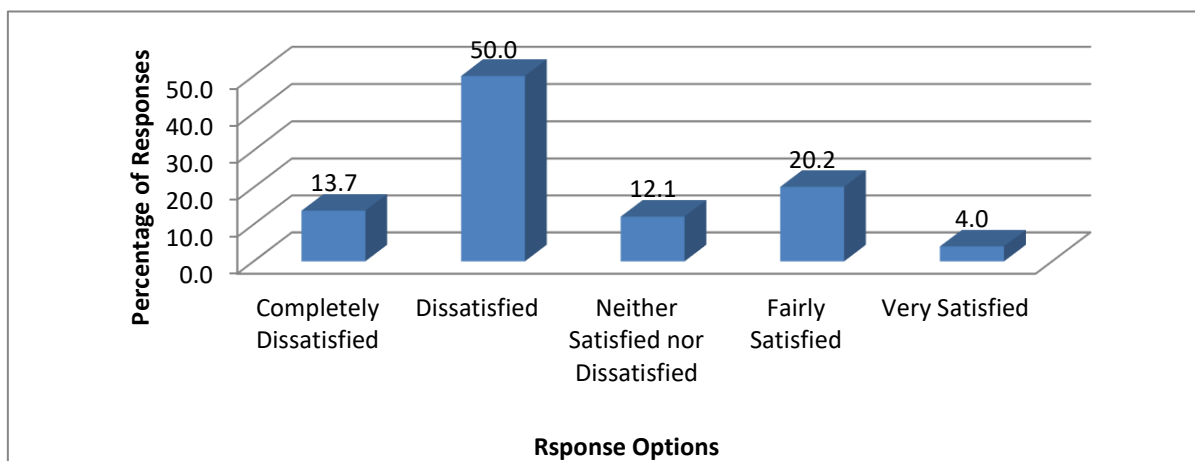
**Figure 1.** Respondents' Perception about Police accountable in terms of proper investigation of reported crime incidences since the ENDSARS protest

Figure 1 showed that the highest proportion (30.4%) of the respondents were uncertain with respect to the perception of police accountability in terms of proper investigation of reported crime incidents since the ENDSARS protest. However, a relatively significant proportion (28.0%) of them acknowledged that the police have demonstrated some levels of accountability since the ENDSARS protest.



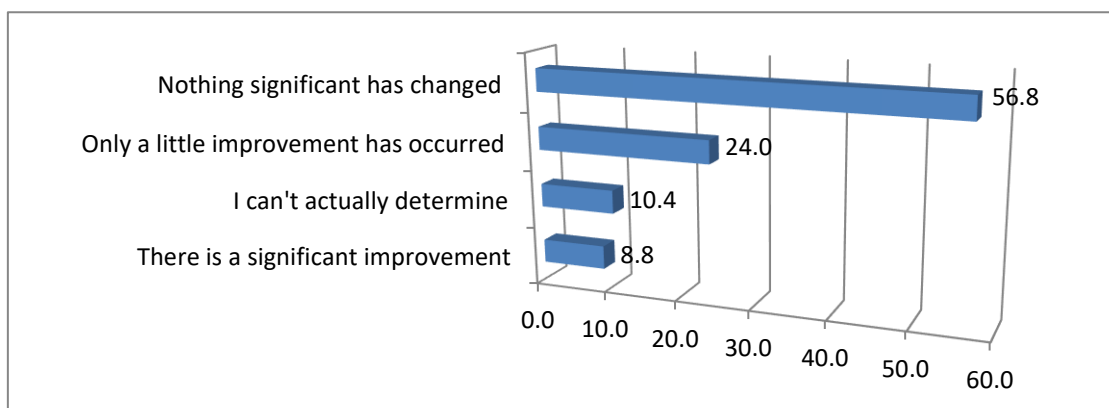
**Figure 2.** Respondents' Perception about Police Accountability in terms of responsiveness to reported crimes and life threatening situations since the ENDSARS protest

As contained in figure 2, it is quite clear that the largest proportion (29.0%) of the respondents rated the NPF as fairly accountable with respect to responsiveness to reported crimes and life threatening situations since the ENDSARS protest. This was however, followed by another significant proportion (25.0%) who were uncertain about it. Meanwhile, 23.4% of them felt that they were unaccountable in that regard.



**Figure 3.** Respondents' level of Satisfaction regarding police accountability in terms of providing the public with information on safety and criminal activities

Data contained in figure 3 clearly showed that half proportion (50.0%) of the respondents were dissatisfied with the level of police accountability with respect to providing the public with information on safety and criminal activities. Only 20.2% of them were fairly satisfied with it, while only a very small proportion (4.0%) of them were very satisfied with it.



**Figure 5.** Respondents' General Impression about the Level of Police Accountability





The respondents were presented with the question ‘considering the public clamour for a more accountable police force during the last ENDSARS protest, what is your general impression about the level of police accountability presently? The analysis showed clearly that slightly more than half proportion (56.8%) of the respondents gave the impression that nothing significant has changed even after all the dramatic issues that happened during the ENDSARS protest. Only about a quarter proportions (24.0%) of them gave the impression that only a little improvement has occurred. This implies that going with majority vote, the NPF has not had the expected change that occasioned the ENDSARS protest in 2020.

**Table 3.**

*Predictors of Respondents’ Perception about Police Accountability in the Post ENDSARS Protest*

<b>Model Fitting Information</b>					
Model	Model Fitting Criteria -2 Log Likelihood	Likelihood Ratio Tests			Sig.
		Chi-Square	df	Sig.	
Intercept Only	116.085				
Final	98.558	17.527	21		.679
<b>Likelihood Ratio Tests</b>					
Effect	Model Fitting Criteria -2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Likelihood Ratio Tests			Nagelkerke
		Chi-Square	df	Sig.	
Intercept	98.558 <sup>a</sup>	.000	0	.	
Gender	104.733	6.175	6	.404	.156
Educational Level	107.069	8.510	9	.484	
Place of Residence	100.163	1.604	6	.952	



The multinomial logistic regression was conducted to determine whether our initial hypothesis which predicted that respondents' perception about police accountability is significantly influenced by their gender, level of educational attainment and place of residence. Result of the test showed that our model was not statistically significant,  $X^2(21, N = 400) = 17.527, p = .679$ , with the model explaining only about 15.6% (Nagelkerke) of variance in the outcome variable. Each of the predictor variables did not show statistically significant influence on the outcome variable, which implies that the perception of the respondents regarding police accountability within the post ENDSARS protest was not significantly influenced by either gender, level of educational attainment nor that of place of residence. In other words, the respondents expressed general perception towards police accountability even when the influence of these variables was considered.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to assess the perception of the public regarding police accountability within the post ENDSARS protest within the context of Southeast Nigeria. The ENDSARS protest marked a significant mass protest against the unaccountability of actions experienced by members of the public in the hands members of the NPF. The protest left a lot of expectations for improved police. However, the level of improvement in police accountability was yet obscured due to dearth of empirical researches on the issues, which necessitated the need for this present research. Through the various aspects of data analysed in relation to this topic, it was concluded that there seems to be less effort by the NPF to address some of the accountability issues that triggered the ENDSARS protest in 2020. The public still perceive the NPF as less accountable in their various operations despite a whole lot of public outcry for a more accountable police



force. This therefore calls for the attention of all stakeholders and communities particularly in the Southeast zone of Nigeria, to join forces in ensuring that that the NPF becomes accountable in their daily operations, as this would not only ensure police effectiveness but legitimacy in the eyes of the public. In this light, the following are recommended for improvement:

1. Communities and stakeholders in should mount more pressure on the federal government to establish independent agency to monitor the activities of the police officers deployed in the various parts of the country, particularly in the Southeast zone of Nigeria.
2. Police officers must be made to become accountable for their actions in a transparent manner that members of the public can see clearly. This would help to instil more confidence in members of the public about the willingness of the police force to instil a sense of accountability in the force.
3. The police force should ensure that the activities of the police personnel are produced in the public domain for the sake of transparency.

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