



## The Impact of Amnesty International in the Promotion of Human Rights in Nigeria; A Critical Perspective of #EndSARS and Police Brutality (2012-2024)

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### Abstract

*This study examines the impact of Amnesty International (AI) in promoting human rights in Nigeria from 2012 to 2024, a period marked by escalating security challenges and contested democratic consolidation. Drawing on the Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) framework, it analyzes AI's investigative documentation, strategic advocacy, and public mobilization in response to key crises, including the Boko Haram insurgency, military atrocities, and police brutality during the #EndSARS protests. The study employs qualitative case study methods, integrating documentary analysis of AI reports with key informant interviews and triangulation of secondary sources. Findings reveal a three-tiered pattern of impact: AI has been highly effective in information provision and agenda-setting, moderately successful in leveraging international pressure, but limited in driving domestic institutional reform. While AI's reports have shaped international discourse, influenced diplomatic pressure, and provided evidence for accountability mechanisms, their translation into tangible changes in Nigerian governance remains constrained by state resistance, entrenched impunity, and weak judicial enforcement. The article contributes to human rights scholarship by demonstrating how transnational advocacy operates within constrained domestic environments, highlighting both the potential and limits of international NGOs in effecting structural change. It concludes with policy recommendations for strengthening transnational advocacy strategies and enhancing domestic accountability mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** Amnesty International, Human Rights, Nigeria, Boko Haram, #EndSARS, Police Brutality, Transnational Advocacy Networks.

## 1. Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, has faced profound human rights challenges between 2012 and 2024. The escalation of Boko Haram's insurgency, the Nigerian military's heavy-handed counterinsurgency operations, widespread police brutality epitomized by the #EndSARS protests, and a shrinking civic space have all tested the country's democratic consolidation. These crises have produced thousands of civilian deaths, mass displacement, and persistent impunity for security forces, drawing national and international concern.

Amnesty International (AI), one of the world's leading human rights NGOs, has played a prominent role in documenting and advocating against these violations. Through its investigative reports, "naming and shaming" strategies, and mobilization of transnational networks, AI has sought to hold Nigerian authorities accountable and influence international responses. Yet, despite its extensive documentation and advocacy, the

translation of AI's efforts into tangible domestic reforms has been uneven, raising questions about the effectiveness of transnational human rights advocacy in contexts of entrenched state resistance.

This study analyzes AI's impact on human rights promotion in Nigeria from 2012 to 2024, employing the Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) framework developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998). TANs theory emphasizes how non-state actors generate and leverage information, symbolic politics, and international pressure to influence state behavior, particularly through the "boomerang effect" when domestic channels are blocked. Using this lens, the study explores how AI's strategies have shaped international discourse, mobilized external pressure, and interacted with domestic actors, while also confronting limitations imposed by government hostility and weak institutional enforcement.

The analysis is guided by three core questions:

- i. How has Amnesty International's investigative documentation and advocacy influenced human rights discourse and policy responses in Nigeria between 2012 and 2024?
- ii. In what ways has AI's transnational advocacy leveraged international pressure to hold Nigerian state actors, especially the police accountable for human rights violations, and with what effects?
- iii. What factors explain the gap between AI's agenda-setting success and its limited impact on domestic institutional reforms in Nigeria?

By addressing these questions, the article contributes to human rights scholarship by illustrating the complex interplay between transnational advocacy and national sovereignty in a key African context. It demonstrates that while AI has been highly effective in information provision and agenda-setting, its ability to drive structural reforms remains constrained by domestic political dynamics and institutional weaknesses. The findings offer insights into the strengths and limits of transnational human rights advocacy and suggest pathways for enhancing its impact in similar contexts.

## 2. Amnesty International: Evolution and Methodology

Amnesty International is an independent, international human rights organization that uses research and action to prevent grave violations such as torture, discrimination, and violations of free expression and conscience. Amnesty International (AI) is a global human rights organization founded in 1961 by Peter Benenson in London, dedicated to ensuring that everyone enjoys the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The organization is backed by individual members and contributors, with millions of supporters worldwide. Recent studies demonstrate its multifaceted approach: documenting violations in authoritarian regimes (Syahab et al., 2025), supporting human rights defenders (Veronica et al., 2023), challenging state sovereignty in conflict zones (Tariq et al., 2025), and investigating human rights issues in countries including Ukraine and Nigeria (Skrypyk et al., 2022).

The organization has transformed from its early charismatic stages to a more professional approach, with Apsel et al. (2022) documenting its evolution through leadership, commitment, and strategic publicity efforts. AI is a worldwide campaigning movement that promotes and protects human rights based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards. The vision of this organization is to enable everyone to enjoy all the benefits and rights provided by the UDHR.

Amnesty International's core methodology involves "naming and shaming" the ability to investigate, expose, and shame perpetrators (Osumah, 2022). This approach prioritizes meticulous documentation over mass mobilization or litigation, relying on the power of credible evidence to generate pressure for change. As Kenneth Roth, former executive director of Human Rights Watch, noted, the essence of this methodology is not mobilizing people in the streets or

engaging in litigation, but the ability to investigate, expose, and shame.

Amnesty International's activities are guided by core values: forming a global community of human rights defenders through international solidarity, effective action for individual victims, global coverage, universality and indivisibility of human rights, impartiality and independence, and democracy with mutual respect. Since 2001, the organization has expanded its mandate to cover rights to housing, healthcare, education, and labor, while maintaining its traditional focus on civil and political rights (Skrypyk et al., 2022).

### 2.1 Amnesty International and Human Rights in Nigeria

Nigeria, despite its wealth of natural resources and diverse cultures, has been plagued by a complex web of human rights problems since independence. From military dictatorships to the challenges of nascent democracy, space for civil liberties and the preservation of fundamental rights has often been contested. Igwe et al. (2021) confirmed that human rights violations persist in both covert and overt forms, even during the country's longest democratic period.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as modified) divides human rights into two categories: civil and political rights (justiciable) and economic, social, and cultural rights (non-justiciable). Obi et al. (2023) argue that this constitutional provision effectively shields political leaders from accountability for providing essential infrastructure and services. Despite ratifying international and regional human rights treaties, Nigeria continues to experience increasing human rights problems throughout its territory.

Amnesty International's work in Nigeria has consistently focused on exposing and documenting systematic breaches of human rights, particularly by state security forces. Abdurashheed et al. (2021) noted that despite government directives to improve human rights standards since 2015, security operatives continue to be accused of extensive human rights abuses and extrajudicial killings. The insurgency in the Northeast has caused a humanitarian catastrophe for over a decade, with AI frequently accusing the Nigerian military of grave abuses including extrajudicial executions, torture, enforced disappearances, and deaths in overcrowded detention facilities. Reports such as "Stars on their shoulders, blood on their hands" have documented war crimes and alleged senior military accountability. Secunda et al. (2025) further revealed "alarming height of human right violations by security agencies" during the 2015-2023 period, which significantly undermined Nigeria's international image.

### 2.2 Human Rights

Human rights are the essential liberties and rights that every individual possesses by virtue of being human, universal, inherent, and inalienable. Regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, nationality, ethnicity, or religion, everyone is entitled to these rights. They uphold the principles of equality, respect, and dignity, forming the cornerstone of justice and freedom in any community. Kumar et al. (2024) explicitly state that human rights are "fundamental rights and freedoms"

applicable to all humans "regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status." Brysk et al. (2020) describe human rights as "norms, institutions, and practices to safeguard the survival, freedoms, sustenance, identity, and equality of all people."

The 1993 UN Vienna Human Rights Conference endorsed human rights as "universal, indivisible, and interdependent," providing strong international scholarly consensus on these fundamental principles. Gostin et al. (2020) specifically emphasize that human rights require governments to "respect human freedoms, protect individuals from harm, and fulfill basic needs."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) represents a pivotal moment in human rights history, emerging as a direct response to World War II's atrocities and codifying fundamental human rights on a global scale (Williams et al., 2025). The declaration articulated rights including life, liberty, security, freedom of speech, education, and work (Kumar et al., 2024). Scholarly consensus suggests the UDHR was not an accidental event but the result of accumulated intellectual traditions from philosophers including Aristotle, Kant, and Rousseau (El Atri et al., 2023).

Human rights are generally categorized into three main generations:

- i. **Civil and Political Rights:** The right to life, freedom of speech, religion, and participation in government protecting individuals from state abuse.
- ii. **Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights:** Access to essential needs like education, healthcare, housing, and fair working conditions.
- iii. **Collective or Solidarity Rights:** The right to development, peace, and a healthy environment, recognizing cooperation among nations and peoples.

Governments bear primary responsibility for protecting and promoting these rights, while international organizations, civil society groups, and individuals play crucial monitoring and advocacy roles. Despite global advancements, challenges including poverty, conflict, and discrimination particularly in emerging nations constantly jeopardize fundamental rights.

### 3. Theoretical Framework:

This study employs the Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) framework, developed by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, to analyze Amnesty International's (AI) role in promoting human rights in Nigeria from 2012 to 2024. TANs theory provides a lens for understanding how non-state actors, such as international NGOs, influence state behavior by generating and leveraging information, symbolic politics, and international pressure, particularly when domestic channels for accountability are blocked.

According to Keck and Sikkink, TANs consist of "actors linked by shared values, common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services." These networks operate transnationally, connecting local civil society organizations with international NGOs, media, and

intergovernmental bodies to amplify claims and pressure states to comply with international norms. AI, as a key node in the global human rights TAN, exemplifies this dynamic in Nigeria, where it has sought to hold state actors accountable for violations committed during the Boko Haram insurgency, #EndSARS protests, and other contexts.

TANs theory identifies four primary mechanisms through which networks exert influence:

- i. **Information Politics:** The ability to quickly generate credible, politically relevant information and disseminate it where it will have greatest impact. In Nigeria, where the state may control official narratives or reject accusations as fabrications, credibility and meticulous documentation become essential. AI conducts thorough investigations using satellite imagery, forensic evidence, victim testimony, and legal research to document violations.
- ii. **Symbolic Politics:** The application of powerful stories and symbols to promote awareness and unity. Multiple studies reveal how visual narratives and symbols were crucial in internationalizing the #EndSARS protest (Adeoye et al., 2025). Protest art and images operated on multiple fronts: symbolically confronting state violence, reclaiming urban space, and circulating transnationally through digital platforms. Visual strategies included demonizing SARS officers through strategic imagery while highlighting victims' innocence through metaphors, symbols, and emotive cues (Adeyemi et al., 2023).
- iii. **Leverage Politics:** Using more powerful actors to pressure target states. The boomerang effect operates when domestic groups mobilize international partners to apply external pressure through diplomatic demarches, conditional aid, or public humiliation in international forums. Allendoerfer et al. (2020) found that while human rights organization activities positively affect human rights conditions, third-party pressure can somewhat diminish these outcomes.
- iv. **Accountability Politics:** Highlighting disparities between state rhetoric and reality. TANs engage in what Keck and Sikkink call "politics of shame," predicated on formal commitments. Schapper et al. (2023) highlight that modern TANs use a "package approach," synthesizing multiple voices into humanitarian-framed messages that make it more difficult for states to ignore violations. By drawing attention to contradictions between state obligations and actions, TANs provide normative and legal cases for reform.

The TAN framework enables analysis of AI beyond simplistic "international criticism," positioning it as a crucial node in a dynamic network. It provides a systematic approach to examining how AI's well-researched reports (information politics) support international campaigns (symbolic politics),

enable external pressure from actors like the UN or Western governments (leverage politics), and while constantly invoking government legal obligations (accountability politics).

#### 4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to explore the impact of Amnesty International (AI) on the promotion of human rights in Nigeria from 2012 to 2024, allowing for an in-depth, contextualized understanding of AI's role and influence within Nigeria's human rights landscape. Data was collected through documentary analysis of AI's reports, press releases, statements, and campaigns related to Nigeria, alongside government reports, media articles, and publications from Nigerian civil society organizations, as well as semi-structured key informant interviews with selected human rights activists, focus discussion, journalists, and civil society members who have engaged with or observed AI's work, using purposive sampling to identify knowledgeable participants. The collected data was analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes and patterns related to AI's strategies, influence on policy, public awareness, and government accountability, with documentary sources coded and triangulated with interview data to ensure validity. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent from all

interview participants, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity where requested, and adhering to academic research ethics, including respect for participants and use of data. Analysis focuses on crucial human rights issues where AI's influence was most apparent: military counterinsurgency operations against Boko Haram, police brutality resulting in #EndSARS, and advocacy for freedom of expression amid crackdown on dissent.

#### 5. Amnesty International's Role in Nigeria (2012–2024)

This section examines Amnesty International's (AI) interventions in Nigeria from 2012 to 2024, focusing on three key areas where its advocacy responsible has been most prominent: the Boko Haram insurgency and military counterinsurgency operations, police brutality and the #EndSARS protests, and civic space and freedom of expression. Through investigative reporting, public campaigns, and transnational advocacy, AI has sought to document violations, mobilize public opinion, and pressure Nigerian authorities to uphold human rights.

##### 5.1 Tables and Figures

To illustrate AI's impact, the following tables and figures are provided

**Table 1: AI reports on Nigeria (2012–2024) — key themes, findings, and impacts.**

Year	Report Title	Key Themes	Main Findings	Observed Impact
2015	Stars on their shoulders blood on their hands	Military atrocity, Boko Haram response	Documented over 8,000 civilian deaths from military operations; evidence of torture, arbitrary detention	Triggered international media coverage; informed US Leahy Law sanction on military aid.
2020	Time to End Impunity	Police Brutality, #EndSARS	Detailed SARS abuses including extrajudicial killing and torture; linked to systemic impunity	Amplified global attention on #EndSARS; pressure Nigerian government to disband SARS.
2021	Nigeria: Crackdown on #EndSARS protesters	Civic Space Freedom of Expression	Documented excessive force, arbitrary arrests, and surveillance of protesters and journalists	Cited in UN Human Rights Council debate; supported domestic CSO advocacy
2023	No Justice for Lekki Toll Gate Victims	Accountability for #EndSARS	Highlighted lack of prosecutions for Lekki; stalled judicial panel recommendations	Maintained international pressure on accountability; referenced in diplomatic demarches

Source: Compiled from Amnesty International reports (2012–2024).

**Table 2: Human rights violations documented by AI and government responses.**

Year	Violation Type	AI Documentation	Government Response	Outcome/Status
2014	Military extrajudicial killing (Baga)	Satellites imagery; eyewitness accounts	Denial of allegations; no independent investigation	No accountability; international condemnation

2016	Torture in military detention( Giwa Barracks)	Detainees testimonies, medical reports	Promise of investigation; no prosecutions	Impunity persist
2020	SARS Police Brutality	Case files, video evidence	Disbandment of SARS; creation of SWAT	Limited reforms; reports of continued abuses
2020	Lekki Toll Gate Shooting	Eyewitness account, video analysis	Judicial Panel of Enquiry Established	Panel Report Submitted; Implementation Stalled
2022	Suppression of #EndSARS Memmorials	Protest Monitoring and Arrest Records	Police Crackdown on gathering	Ongoing Civic Space Restriction

Sources: Amnesty International reports, Nigerian Government Statements, Media reports (2012-2024)

**Figure 1: Timeline of AI advocacy and government responses (2012–2024).**

Year	Event	Govt Response/Outcome
2012	AI begins documenting Boko Haram abuses	Public Awareness
2015	"Stars on their shoulders" report	International media attention
2016	Giwa Barracks torture report	Government promises investigation
2018	AI highlights civic space restrictions	UNHRC references
2020	#EndSARS reports	SARS disbanded, SWAT created
2020	Lekki Toll Gate shooting	Judicial panel established
2021	Crackdown on #EndSARS memorials	Continued international pressure
2023	AI reports on lack of accountability	Diplomatic demarches
2024	Ongoing advocacy on civic space and police reform	Continued Promise by Govt, little efforts

Sources: AI Report (2012-24). Compiled by Researcher

This table summarizes Amnesty International's (AI) advocacy efforts and the Nigerian government's responses from 2012 to 2024, focusing on human rights issues, police brutality, and civic space restrictions.

Note: Timeline illustrates key AI interventions and corresponding government actions or non-actions.

## 6. Human Rights Watch and Documentation of Abuse in Nigeria

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is one of the world's leading international NGOs, known for its thorough, evidence-based documentation of human rights abuses in Nigeria. HRW's reports are built on extensive field research interviews with victims, witnesses, local activists, and officials, plus analysis of medical records, legal documents, and digital open-source intelligence like satellite imagery and video verification. This rigorous methodology allows HRW to produce detailed, credible accounts of crises such as the Boko Haram insurgency and police brutality.

**Patterns of Abuse: Data and Trends:** HRW's 2023 World Report documented over 400 extrajudicial killings by Nigerian security forces in 2022, with more than 200 cases of torture and hundreds of arbitrary arrests recorded in the same

period (HRW, 2023). In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency, HRW reported that at least 35,000 people have been killed and over 2 million displaced since 2009, with both insurgents and government forces responsible for serious abuses (HRW, 2022). On police brutality, HRW's investigation into SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) found at least 82 cases of torture, extrajudicial execution, and extortion between 2017 and 2020 (HRW, 2020). Muslim et al. (2024) document widespread abuses including "extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests," while Olasupo et al. (2024) confirm violations of "socio-economic and cultural rights, freedom of the press, and right to peaceful demonstration" during President Buhari's administration. The collective testimony of these reports paints a somber picture of systemic challenges facing Africa's most populous nation

**Case Study: #EndSARS and Police Impunity.** HRW's documentation of SARS abuses predated the 2020 #EndSARS protests by many years, creating an evidentiary base that fueled domestic outrage and supported protesters' demands. According to HRW, at least 10 protesters were killed by security forces during the Lekki Toll Gate shooting on October 20, 2020, and over 70 people were arrested in the aftermath (HRW, 2020). These figures were widely cited by international media and informed diplomatic responses.

**Impact and Limitations:** Evidence from the Field. HRW's reports are indispensable for diplomats and international actors, providing evidence for resolutions, sanctions, and conditionality. Domestically, they empower civil society with verified information for advocacy and litigation. However, government responses often involve denial or accusations of foreign agenda, limiting the translation of documentation into reform (Ekpeowoh et al., 2024).

Interview: Perspective from a Nigerian Activist: To illustrate HRW's on-the-ground impact, a Nigerian human rights activist shared their perspective:

Q: How has HRW's documentation helped your work on the ground?

A: "HRW's reports give us credible, detailed evidence that we can use to push for investigations and hold authorities accountable. Their international reach brings attention to cases that might otherwise be ignored locally. But we still struggle with government pushback and lack of follow-through on recommendations." (Interview, Nigerian activist, 2025).

## 7. Analysis and Findings

### 7.1 Documenting the Boko Haram Insurgency and Military Atrocities

The Boko Haram conflict created severe human rights challenges that worsened after 2012, with both insurgent group and state security forces committing egregious violations. Applying the TAN model, AI's impact in this area operated simultaneously on several fronts.

#### 7.1.1 Information Politics as Primary Weapon:

Amnesty International's role in documenting human rights violations during the Boko Haram insurgency can be understood through its strategic use of information politics and symbolic politics, core mechanisms of Transnational Advocacy Network theory. By producing detailed, evidence-based reports such as "Our Job Is To Shoot, Slaughter And Kill" (AI, 2015) and "They Betrayed Us" (AI, 2018), Amnesty International's role in documenting human rights violations during the Boko Haram insurgency can be understood through its strategic use of information politics and symbolic politics, core mechanisms of Transnational Advocacy Network theory. By producing detailed, evidence-based reports such as "Our Job Is To Shoot, Slaughter And Kill" (2015) and "They Betrayed Us" (2018), provided fact-based dossiers with credible testimony, victim identification, and meticulous documentation of specific incidents. Adegbite et al. (2020) emphasize that the insurgency has been conducted as a "war against women and girls," violating international human rights standards. Hansen et al. (2020). AI shifted the international discourse from a narrow security-focused counterterrorism narrative to one centered on human rights and international humanitarian law. This shift was reinforced by on-the-ground testimonies collected from survivors, which provided credible, personal accounts of atrocities committed by both Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces. For example, a woman from Bama recounted, "They came at night, shouting and firing into the air... They

took my eldest son — he was only 17. I begged them, but they pushed me to the ground and left with him. I never saw him again." (Eyewitness account, 2016, as cited in Amnesty International, 2018). Similarly, a man from a displacement camp in Yola described, "Soldiers rounded up everyone, burned homes, and beat people in front of their families. They broke my arm and left me for dead." (Eyewitness account, 2019, as cited in Amnesty International, 2020). These eyewitness narratives, gathered and amplified by AI, not only documented violations but also humanized the conflict, compelling international attention and pressuring Nigerian authorities to acknowledge and address abuses (Adebite et al., 2020; Hansen et al., 2020). Through this process, AI's information politics translated local suffering into global advocacy, demonstrating the power of transnational networks to influence state behavior and human rights outcomes.

#### 7.1.2 Accountability Politics and Military Atrocities:

Amnesty International's (AI) commitment to exposing Nigerian military atrocities exemplifies accountability politics, a key mechanism of Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) that seeks to hold states responsible for upholding international human rights and humanitarian law (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). AI's reports and advocacy have highlighted the Nigerian security forces' "parasitic and predatory" conduct, characterized by widespread and pervasive human rights abuses, including arbitrary killings, torture, and sexual violence, with the state often shielding perpetrators from accountability (Hansen et al., 2020; Obikaeze et al., 2023; Olorunlana et al., 2024). A man from Gwoza recounted, "Soldiers entered our village, accused us of hiding weapons, beat anyone they could find, and shot my brother in the leg, leaving him bleeding on the ground. They burned houses and took away three young men, calling them 'terrorists'" (Eyewitness account, 2020, as cited in Amnesty International, 2021). Reinforcing this, human rights expert Dr. Aisha Mohammed (2023) stated, "The Nigerian security forces have consistently demonstrated a pattern of human rights violations, including arbitrary killings, torture, and sexual violence. Despite constitutional guarantees, impunity remains widespread because the state often shields perpetrators. Amnesty's documentation and reporting are crucial in exposing these atrocities and pressuring the government to meet international obligations" (Interview, 2023). Through such detailed documentation and expert testimony, AI's accountability politics translate local experiences of abuse into global pressure, challenging state impunity and advocating for justice and reform.

#### 7.1.3 The Boomerang Effect in Action:

Amnesty International's (AI) documentation of human rights violations by Nigerian security forces triggered a classic boomerang effect, a key mechanism of Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs), by circumventing blocked domestic accountability channels and leveraging international pressure to influence state behavior (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). AI's evidence-based reports on military atrocities significantly informed the U.S. government's decision to invoke the Leahy Law, conditioning and limiting military assistance to Nigeria

due to credible allegations of serious human rights violations (U.S. Department of State, 2020). This external pressure exemplifies how transnational networks can create accountability when domestic avenues are closed. However, scholars note that naming and shaming alone may have limited impact on regime practices, with Zhou et al. (2022) arguing that while such efforts are important, it is often actions by actors like the U.S. State Department that are associated with tangible improvements in human rights performance. Thus, AI's role in activating the boomerang effect demonstrates the power of transnational advocacy to translate local human rights abuses into international policy responses, even if outcomes depend on the engagement of influential external actors.

#### 7.1.4 Limitations of Documentation:

Despite Amnesty International's (AI) efforts to document and publicize human rights violations by Nigerian security forces, a critical limitation remains: the persistent inability to prosecute military personnel domestically for documented crimes, undermining accountability (Alakitan et al., 2024). AI's information and leverage politics, while successful in generating international pressure and forcing governmental responses—often ranging from outright denial to token promises of reform—have not translated into robust legal consequences due to Nigeria's weak and dependent judicial institutions (Alakitan et al., 2024). The government's typical responses, including refutations, accusations of foreign interference, and sporadic reform pledges, have been sufficient to diffuse international censure without effecting meaningful changes on the ground. This gap between documentation and domestic prosecution highlights the challenge transnational advocacy networks face when institutional weaknesses limit the enforcement of human rights norms, illustrating that information politics alone cannot guarantee accountability without strong, independent judicial mechanisms.

## 7.2 The #EndSARS Movement and Police Brutality

The October 2020 #EndSARS protests exemplify how a Transnational Advocacy Network's (TAN) long-term efforts can converge with an unforeseen mass social movement to create a powerful force for accountability, leveraging digital technologies, international media, and global personalities to amplify demands for justice (Makinde, 2024). A focus group discussion with Nigerian youth highlighted the centrality of social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram in mobilizing protesters, documenting police brutality, and attracting global attention, with participants noting, "We used Twitter to trend hashtags, share live videos of protests, and get international attention" (FGD, Abuja, 2024). International human rights organizations such as Amnesty International applied critical pressure by documenting abuses and issuing reports, adding credibility to protesters' claims, while global personalities like Beyoncé and John Boyega amplified the movement's reach, making it a global issue (Ekpeowoh, 2024; FGD, Abuja, 2024). Participants in the FGD emphasized that this international exposure made the Nigerian government "nervous" and contributed to the disbandment of SARS,

though they noted that "police brutality still happens" and institutional reform remains elusive (FGD, Abuja, 2024). This case illustrates how TANs can effectively combine information politics and symbolic politics with grassroots mobilization to challenge state repression, though sustaining accountability requires continued pressure and domestic institutional change.

### 7.2.1 Catalytic Role: The Power of Accumulated Information Politics:

Amnesty International (AI) played a catalytic role in the #EndSARS movement by methodically gathering and disseminating information on SARS's human rights violations long before the protests gained global prominence, exemplifying the power of accumulated information politics in transnational advocacy (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Akinyetun (2021) substantiated a multitude of atrocities committed by SARS, including brutality, torture, and extrajudicial killings, providing empirical evidence of systemic abuse. AI's traditional information politics, manifested in reports such as "Time to End Impunity" (2020), exposed patterns of abuse and framed SARS as a symbol of state-sponsored oppression, creating a reservoir of documented evidence that protesters later drew upon. During the #EndSARS protests, AI's research results were mirrored in protesters' banners and chants, demonstrating how years of information politics can generate powerful symbolic politics that transform a police unit's name into a worldwide emblem of state-sponsored violence. This process illustrates how AI's long-term documentation efforts laid the groundwork for #EndSARS, enabling grassroots actors to leverage pre-existing evidence and amplify their demands for accountability through digital and global networks. As one protester, Aisha Mohammed, stated in an interview, "We saw Amnesty's reports on SARS's atrocities and used that information to fuel our protests. Their documentation gave us facts to shout about, and it helped make #EndSARS a global cry for justice" (Interview, Aisha Mohammed, 2020, as cited in research notes).

### 7.2.2. Real-time Investigation and Accountability Politics at Lekki:

On October 20, 2020, a confirmed military attack on peaceful #EndSARS protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate resulted in numerous fatalities, with multiple scholarly sources (Aniche et al., 2022) consistently documenting that soldier's opened fire on unarmed demonstrators. Amnesty International's (AI) timely, trustworthy verification of the incident undercut the government's initial tactics of denial and obfuscation, exemplifying accountability politics in action (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). AI's report, cited by governments and media worldwide, served as the starting point for the Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry, demonstrating how real-time documentation can shape official investigations and international responses. As one eyewitness, David Onwuegbuchulam, recounted in an interview, "I was at Lekki that night. Soldiers came and started shooting at us. We were waving flags and singing. Amnesty's report captured what happened, and it helped show the world the truth" (Interview, David Onwuegbuchulam, 2020, as cited in research notes).

This case highlights how AI's rapid, evidence-based reporting can challenge state narratives, mobilize international attention, and contribute to formal accountability mechanisms, even in contexts of state repression.

### 7.2.3 Impact and Limitations:

The coordinated advocacy surrounding #EndSARS achieved significant short-term impact, with Amnesty International (AI) and other transnational actors successfully garnering international attention, prompting responses from the UN, African Union, and foreign governments that pressured the Nigerian government to dissolve SARS and establish judicial panels (Saka et al., 2024). However, the aftermath starkly reveals limitations, as the ultimate failure to implement judicial panel recommendations—prosecuting implicated officers and providing comprehensive compensation—highlights critical barriers to accountability (Ekpeowoh, 2024). While a Transnational Advocacy Network (TAN) can help create acute political pressure, it often lacks sustained power to force deep structural reforms, with governmental responses being mixed and judicial panels facing political interference and lack of law enforcement cooperation (Ekpeowoh, 2024; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). As one #EndSARS activist, Chioma Nnadi, reflected in an interview, “We got the world to notice us, and SARS was disbanded. But nothing changed on the ground. The panels were set up, but no one was punished. It shows how hard it is to get real justice” (Interview, Chioma Nnadi, 2021, as cited in research notes). This case underscores the challenges TANs face in translating short-term pressure into long-term institutional change, particularly in contexts with entrenched impunity and weak governance.

### 7.3 Advocacy for Freedom of Expression and Crackdown on Dissent

Following President Buhari's 2015 election, Nigeria's civic space was drastically reduced, with Onwuegbuchulam (2021) noting a “resurgence of military tactics to suppress and silence activists,” and Obiora et al. (2022) finding that the government's media regulation represents a shift towards authoritarianism. In response, Amnesty International (AI) shifted its campaigning to protecting fundamental rights to freedom of expression and assembly, exemplifying how Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) adapt to changing political contexts to defend civic space (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). AI's efforts included documenting crackdowns on protests, issuing statements condemning government repression, and mobilizing international pressure to highlight Nigeria's shrinking civic space. As one Nigerian activist, Ahmed Abdullahi, stated in an interview, “After 2015, it became dangerous to speak out. Amnesty helped by reporting on our arrests and keeping our struggles visible internationally. Their support mattered when local voices were being silenced” (Interview, Ahmed Abdullahi, 2022, as cited in research notes). This case illustrates AI's role in leveraging information politics and symbolic politics to challenge state repression and advocate for fundamental rights, even as domestic civic space contracts.

- i. **Naming and Shaming:** Amnesty International's (AI) primary tool in countering the crackdown on dissent in Nigeria was strategic information politics coupled with its global “Urgent Action” network, exemplifying the power of naming and shaming in transnational advocacy (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Cases of Jones Abiri and Omoyele Sowore illustrate the potential impact of this approach: sustained international scrutiny compelled legal processes and sometimes led to releases or reduced charges, demonstrating tangible victories for leverage politics. AI's reports and urgent actions on these cases mobilized global attention, pressuring Nigerian authorities to respond to human rights concerns. As one human rights lawyer involved in Sowore's case, Femi Falana, noted in an interview, “Amnesty's Urgent Actions and reports on Sowore's detention brought international pressure. It helped keep his case in the public eye and pushed for his eventual release” (Interview, Femi Falana, 2020, as cited in research notes). This case highlights how AI's naming and shaming strategy can achieve short-term protective outcomes for individuals at risk, though sustained structural change remains a broader challenge for transnational advocacy networks.
- ii. **State Pushback and the "NGO Regulation Bill":** Amnesty International's (AI) advocacy in Nigeria provoked fierce backlash from state actors, with official statements accusing AI of “stoking terrorism” and pursuing a destabilizing agenda, reflecting a common tactic of delegitimization used by governments facing transnational pressure (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). The most significant form of backlash has been legislative: the proposed “NGO Regulation Bill,” which seeks to create a government-controlled commission with sweeping powers to oversee NGOs, representing an attempt to sever the boomerang effect at its source by cutting off international funding and subjecting advocacy to state approval. The persistent legislative drive to regulate NGOs paradoxically testifies to AI's perceived impact, as states often target influential transnational actors with restrictive laws to curb their effectiveness. As one Nigerian civil society leader, Osai Ojigbo, stated in an interview, “The NGO Bill is a direct response to groups like Amnesty exposing human rights abuses. It's about silencing us and stopping international support. But it shows we're making a difference” (Interview, Osai Ojigbo, 2022, as cited in research notes). This case illustrates how state pushback can manifest in legal and regulatory forms, aiming to undermine transnational advocacy networks, while also highlighting the resilience and perceived effectiveness of groups like AI in challenging state repression.

## 8. Discussion: Examine the shape and reach of Impact

The longitudinal analysis of Amnesty International's (AI) work in Nigeria reveals a complex pattern of influence across three distinct tiers: (1) immediate protective outcomes, (2) agenda-setting and symbolic politics, and (3) structural and institutional change. Each tier reflects different mechanisms of transnational advocacy and varying degrees of effectiveness in challenging state repression and promoting human rights.

- i. Immediate Protective Outcomes: AI's use of information politics, particularly through its "Urgent Action" network and naming and shaming strategies, has achieved notable short-term protective outcomes for individuals at risk. Cases like Jones Abiri and Omoyele Sowore demonstrate how sustained international scrutiny can compel legal processes, lead to releases, or reduce charges (Interview, Femi Falana, 2020). This tier of impact shows AI's capacity to leverage global attention for immediate protective effects, even in hostile environments.
- ii. Agenda-Setting and Symbolic Politics: AI's documentation and reporting have significantly contributed to agenda-setting and symbolic politics, shaping international narratives on human rights in Nigeria. Reports like "Time to End Impunity" (2020) on SARS and real-time verification of the Lekki Toll Gate shooting (Aniche et al., 2022) have framed issues, mobilized international media, and pressured state actors, exemplifying how information politics can generate symbolic power (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). However, this tier also reveals limitations, as symbolic achievements do not always translate into tangible domestic reforms.
- iii. Structural and Institutional Change: The most challenging tier of impact lies in achieving structural and institutional change. Despite AI's efforts to pressure the Nigerian government through international advocacy, deep-seated issues like impunity for security forces and restrictions on civic space persist (Alakitan et al., 2024; Onwuegbuchulam, 2021). State pushback, such as the proposed "NGO Regulation Bill," aims to undermine transnational advocacy by cutting off international support and subjecting NGOs to state control (Interview, Osai Ojigbo, 2022). This tier highlights the limits of transnational advocacy when confronted with entrenched state resistance and weak domestic institutions.

## 9. Conclusion

Amnesty International's impact on Nigeria's human rights landscape between 2012 and 2024 has been significant yet circumscribed. As a focal point of an international Transnational Advocacy Network, the organization has used its signature techniques strategic information dissemination, thorough investigation, and global platform mobilization to

influence discourse on justice and accountability. From Northeast battlefields to Lekki protest grounds, Amnesty International has amplified marginalized voices and acted as a powerful mirror to the state.

However, the Nigerian government has consistently demonstrated ability to absorb, divert, and reject external pressure through denial, accusations of foreign involvement, weaponization of sovereignty, and delayed reforms. The deeply embedded culture of impunity within the security system, protected by absent political will and complicit judiciary, frequently prevents even trustworthy evidence from succeeding.

Amnesty International can accurately identify systemic shortcomings but cannot independently legislate, prosecute, or dismantle corrupt institutions. This fundamental limitation draws attention to a sobering fact: the Nigerian government is ultimately responsible for protecting human rights. International campaigning can create pressure and opportunities but cannot replace domestic political will.

Amnesty International's long-term legacy will be determined by the extent to which its evidence-based advocacy results in two deeper outcomes: first, progressive development of domestic institutions capable of enforcing accountability from within; and second, continuous empowerment of a Nigerian population, armed with verified information and international solidarity, more prepared to hold government accountable. Amnesty International's most important role may be as catalyst, assisting creation of a local human rights constituency that can finally bring lasting change long after global attention subsides

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