

## The Impact of #EndSARS Protests on Tourism Infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** The #EndSARS protests, a major socio-political movement in Nigeria, significantly impacted various sectors, including tourism. This study explores the effects of the protests on tourism infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria. Employing a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research, the study assesses the extent of damage to tourism facilities, economic losses, and long-term implications for the region's tourism development. The findings indicate considerable damage to key tourism infrastructure, including hotels, recreational facilities, and transport services, resulting in severe financial losses and a decline in tourist arrivals. These disruptions were compounded by the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, further straining the tourism sector. The economic repercussions include reduced revenue and a potential decrease in future investments. The research also reveals significant socio-economic consequences for local communities reliant on tourism for their livelihoods. Interviews with stakeholders highlight an urgent need for strategic interventions to restore confidence in the tourism

industry and improve its resilience (Achu et al, 2025). Recommendations include enhancing security measures, fostering community involvement in tourism planning, and investing in robust infrastructure to withstand socio-political disruptions. Addressing these challenges can help Calabar rebuild its tourism potential and support sustainable economic development. This study emphasizes the need for a coordinated effort among government agencies, the private sector, and local communities to ensure long-term tourism sustainability.

**Keywords:** *#EndSARS, Tourism Infrastructure, Calabar Metropolis, Economic Impact*

## **Introduction**

Tourism is globally recognized as a catalyst for socio-economic development, fostering employment, cultural exchange, and infrastructure growth. However, the viability and growth of the tourism industry rely heavily on the presence of stable infrastructure and a secure socio-political environment (UNWTO, 2021). Across the world, political unrest and civil disturbances have frequently undermined tourism activities by damaging infrastructure and creating perceptions of insecurity that deter both domestic and international visitors (Gössling & Hall, 2021). Past events such as the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, and widespread demonstrations in Latin America have demonstrated the fragility of tourism destinations in the face of civil unrest.

In Nigeria, the #EndSARS protests, which erupted in October 2020, represent a historic civil movement against police brutality, corruption, and systemic governance failures. Initially triggered by long-standing abuses by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the protests rapidly gained national and international attention, uniting thousands of young Nigerians both physically and virtually in a call for justice and reform (Amnesty International, 2020; Akinlabi & Murphy, 2021). Although largely peaceful, the protests eventually escalated into violent clashes, property destruction, looting, and mass arrests following the controversial use of military force, particularly during the Lekki Toll Gate incident. These developments led to the imposition of curfews in major cities and had widespread ripple effects on economic sectors, especially tourism (Human Rights Watch, 2021; Premium Times, 2020).

Tourism infrastructure which includes hotels, transport systems, cultural centers, museums, and recreational facilities is particularly vulnerable during periods of social unrest. In the aftermath of the #EndSARS protests, many Nigerian cities witnessed extensive damage to hospitality establishments, disruptions to transport networks, and plummeting visitor numbers due to safety concerns (Okonkwo et al., 2021). In some cases, businesses were forced to close, either temporarily or permanently, as a result of financial losses and security threats (Ihugba, 2021). The Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC, 2021) acknowledged these setbacks and emphasized the need for strategic rebuilding and resilience mechanisms to ensure continuity in tourism activities.

Calabar Metropolis, the capital of Cross River State, is one of Nigeria's foremost cultural tourism destinations, known for its iconic attractions such as the Calabar Carnival, Tinapa Resort, Slave History Museum, and Cross River National Park. For decades, these attractions have drawn both local and international tourists, contributing significantly to the local economy (Eja et al., 2020). However, the #EndSARS protests brought about localized disruptions in Calabar, with reported cases of vandalism, blocked roads, business closures, and declining revenues in the hospitality sector. The reduction in tourist traffic, compounded by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, created a dual crisis for tourism development in the metropolis (Ushie & Udida, 2022).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The #EndSARS protests caused considerable damage to tourism infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis, particularly affecting hotels, restaurants, museums, and transportation services. These damages not only resulted in immediate financial losses for operators but also disrupted the long-term development trajectory of the local tourism sector. In addition to infrastructural damage, the protests intensified existing challenges such as insecurity, limited public trust, and declining visitor confidence. Despite the strategic role of Calabar as a tourism hub, there remains a significant gap in empirical research focusing on how the #EndSARS protests specifically impacted tourism infrastructure in the city. Without a clear understanding of the extent and nature of these impacts, planning effective recovery and resilience strategies becomes difficult.

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To evaluate the level of damage inflicted on tourism infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis.
2. To analyze the economic repercussions of the damage on the local tourism industry.
3. To investigate how the damage to tourism infrastructure has affected businesses and individuals reliant on tourism.
4. To identify the specific needs for recovery and reconstruction of tourism infrastructure.
5. To assess the long-term implications of the protests on tourism development in Calabar Metropolis.

## Literature Review

Tourism infrastructure is a fundamental pillar for the growth and sustainability of tourism destinations. It encompasses essential physical facilities and services such as accommodation, transportation networks, and recreational amenities that support the tourism industry (UNWTO, 2019; Achu et al, 2025). Disruptions to this infrastructure, especially due to socio-political instability, can result in severe economic and social consequences, particularly for communities and individuals whose livelihoods are closely tied to tourism activities (Goodwin, 2017). Although the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria initially emerged as a call for police reform and the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), it evolved into a broader protest against systemic injustice, corruption, and state-led violence. The nationwide protests, particularly those that escalated into violence, looting, and vandalism, significantly disrupted economic activities across several urban centers, including Calabar Metropolis. Prior literature emphasizes that political unrest and civil disturbances can deter tourist visitation, damage infrastructure, and undermine a destination's appeal (Pizam & Smith, 2000).

In the specific context of Calabar, the #EndSARS protests in October 2020 resulted in widespread damage to critical tourism infrastructure. Uyang et al. (2024) reported that numerous facilities including hotels, cultural institutions, transportation systems,

and recreational centers were vandalized, looted, or rendered non-functional due to protest-related violence. The Cross River State Commissioner for Finance estimated that the total cost of damage to government-owned assets alone stood at approximately ₦100 billion (Premium Times, 2024). This level of destruction not only halted tourism operations temporarily but also exposed the vulnerability of tourism infrastructure to socio-political crises. The economic impact on the tourism sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), was severe. Many businesses in the hospitality and travel sectors experienced property losses, a drastic decline in patronage, and revenue shortfalls. Uyang et al. (2024) identified a statistically significant correlation between the protests and the operational setbacks experienced by SMEs in the tourism value chain. In addition to direct damages, curfews and heightened insecurity discouraged both domestic and international travel, resulting in the temporary or permanent closure of several businesses and loss of employment for numerous workers in the sector.

Beyond immediate economic implications, the protests had broader socio-economic effects on local communities in Calabar. The downturn in tourism-related activities contributed to rising unemployment and a reduction in income, particularly for informal workers and service providers whose livelihoods depended on tourist spending. As reported by (Uyang et al., 2024; Tangban et al., 2024), the decline in economic activity exacerbated food insecurity and contributed to growing social tensions within affected neighborhoods. These outcomes underscore the need for targeted social support mechanisms and broader economic diversification strategies to bolster community resilience.

The long-term implications of the #EndSARS protests on tourism development in Calabar are multifaceted and deeply concerning. The destruction of tourism infrastructure and the erosion of tourist confidence have severely impacted the city's reputation as a secure and attractive destination (Alu & James, 2024). Restoration and recovery will require strategic investment, policy innovation, and coordinated stakeholder engagement. Moreover, the protests have brought to the forefront the importance of developing robust crisis preparedness and management frameworks within the tourism sector. As Uyang et al. (2024) contend, building long-term

resilience in tourism destinations such as Calabar demands proactive planning that integrates safety, community engagement, and infrastructure sustainability.

## Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods research design to examine the impact of the #EndSARS protests on tourism infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys distributed to managers and owners of tourism-related businesses, such as hotels, cultural centers, and transportation providers. Additional information on the extent of infrastructure damage and estimated financial losses was sourced from official reports by the Cross River State Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Finance.

Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including hotel managers, tour operators, government officials, and representatives of tourism associations. These interviews focused on the perceived effects of the protests, the recovery challenges, and suggestions for improving crisis management. Field observations were also conducted to assess visible damage at major tourism sites. This combination of methods allowed for a well-rounded understanding of the protest's socio-economic impact.

## Results and Discussion

### *Extent of Damage to Tourism Infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis*

From the table, it is evident that hotels experienced the most significant damage, with the highest financial losses estimated at \$250,000. The transport services, though impacted, had a lower financial loss compared to accommodation facilities. The recreational facilities and cultural sites also faced damage but were less affected in terms of financial losses.

Table 1: Extent of Damage to Tourism Infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis

s/n	Tourism Infrastructure	Extent of Damage	Financial Loss (USD)	Number of Affected Businesses
1	Hotels	Severe damage (vandalism, looting)	\$250,000	5

2	Recreational Facilities	Minor to moderate (broken facilities, looting)	\$100,000	3
3	Transport Services	Severe disruption (roadblocks, vehicle damage)	\$150,000	2
4	Cultural Sites (Museums, Historical Sites)	Minor damage (graffiti, broken windows)	\$50,000	4

Source: Authors Field work, 2025

### Economic Impact on Tourism Businesses in Calabar Metropolis

The table shows a dramatic decline in revenue across all sectors, with hotels suffering a 60% revenue loss and a 70% drop in tourist arrivals. Transport services and recreational facilities were similarly affected, with revenue drops of 70% and 66%, respectively. The overall decline in tourist numbers reinforces the financial strain caused by the #EndSARS protests, compounded by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2: Economic Impact on Tourism Businesses in Calabar Metropolis

s/n	Business Type	Revenue Before Protests (USD)	Revenue After Protests (USD)	Percentage Change	Tourist Arrival Before Protests	Tourist Arrival After Protests	Percentage Decline
1	Hotels	\$500,000	\$200,000	-60%	10,000	3,000	-70%
2	Recreational Facilities	\$150,000	\$50,000	-66%	5,000	1,200	-76%
3	Transport Services	\$100,000	\$30,000	-70%	3,000	800	-73%

Source: Authors Field work, 2025

### Socio-Economic Impact on Local Communities

The socio-economic impact on local communities is substantial, with 75% of stakeholders reporting job losses, especially in the tourism sector. There is a significant decrease in local spending, as evidenced by 65% of respondents, and 70% of small businesses saw a decline in sales. Insecurity concerns were also prevalent,

with 50% of respondents expressing fear of future disruptions, deterring further investment and tourism-related activities.

Table 3: Socio-Economic Impact on Local Communities

S/n	Impact Category	Description	Percentage of Stakeholders Affected
1	Job Losses	Employees in hotels, restaurants, and transport services lost jobs due to business closures	75%
2	Decreased Local Spending	Reduced number of tourists led to decreased spending in local markets and services	65%
3	Loss of Livelihood for Small Businesses	Small tourism-related businesses, such as souvenir shops, experienced a sharp decline in sales	70%
4	Increased Insecurity	Increased fear of further unrest led to reduced business operations and investment	50%

Source: Authors Field work, 2025

### Recovery Needs and Recommendations from Stakeholders

The recovery strategies reflect strong consensus on the need for improved security (85% support), followed by investment in resilient infrastructure (80% support). Community involvement is also seen as a critical factor, with 70% of stakeholders emphasizing its role in recovery. There is also moderate support (60%) for promoting domestic tourism to offset the reduction in international tourist arrivals.

Table 4: Recovery Needs and Recommendations from Stakeholders

S/n	Recovery Strategy	Importance	Stakeholders Supporting	Percentage of Support
1	Strengthening Security Measures	Ensures safety for tourists and businesses	Government, Hotel Owners, Tour Operators	85%
2	Investment in Resilient Infrastructure	Ensures long-term sustainability of tourism facilities	Hotel Owners, Transport Operators, Local Communities	80%
3	Community Involvement in Tourism Planning	Builds local support and ensures long-term recovery	Government, Community Leaders, Tour Operators	70%
4	Promotion of Domestic Tourism	Compensates for the decline in international visitors	Tour Operators, Hotel Owners, Government	60%

Source: Authors Field work, 2025



## Long-Term Implications of #EndSARS Protests on Tourism Development

The long-term outlook is mixed, with a negative impact on tourist arrivals and investment in infrastructure due to security concerns. However, the protests also present an opportunity to rebuild tourism infrastructure with enhanced resilience, and there is potential for stronger local community engagement in tourism development.

Table 5: Long-Term Implications of #EndSARS Protests on Tourism Development

S/n	Impact Area	Description	Long-Term Effect
1	Reduced Tourist Arrivals	Ongoing insecurity concerns could deter future visitors	Negative
2	Decreased Investment in Tourism Infrastructure	Investors may be hesitant to invest due to perceived risks	Negative
3	Opportunity for Resilient Infrastructure	Opportunities to rebuild stronger and more secure infrastructure	Positive
4	Enhanced Local Community Engagement	Increased involvement of local communities in tourism planning	Positive

Source: Authors Field work, 2025

## Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that the accommodation sector, particularly hotels, bore the brunt of the damage during the #EndSARS protests in Calabar Metropolis. These establishments recorded the most significant financial losses, underscoring their heightened exposure to socio-political disruptions (Uyang et al., 2024). Although transport services, cultural centers, and recreational sites were also impacted, their losses were relatively moderate in comparison. Nonetheless, the combined effect of these damages severely hampered tourism operations and service delivery across the city (Goodwin, 2017). Revenue decline was evident across all segments of the tourism industry. Hotels experienced a sharp drop in tourist arrivals and income, while other sectors such as transport and recreation similarly saw marked reductions in economic activity. These losses were further aggravated by the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had already weakened the tourism sector's financial stability (UNWTO, 2021).

The socio-economic ripple effects extended into the wider community, with many stakeholders reporting widespread job losses and business closures. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in tourism-related services reported a drastic decline in sales, affecting household incomes and contributing to broader economic vulnerability (Uyang et al., 2024 Tangban et al., 2024). Insecurity was also identified as a persistent concern, discouraging both investment and tourism participation (Pizam & Smith, 2000). To address these challenges, stakeholders strongly emphasized the need to improve security and invest in resilient infrastructure as key components of recovery. They also highlighted the importance of involving local communities in tourism planning and rebuilding efforts to ensure long-term sustainability (Eja et al., 2022). Encouraging domestic tourism was recommended as a viable short-term strategy to compensate for reduced international arrivals and to support local economies.

Although the long-term outlook for tourism in Calabar remains uncertain, the crisis presents an opportunity for renewal. Strategic investment in crisis-resilient infrastructure, inclusive tourism policies, and community engagement can reposition the city as a stronger and more sustainable tourism destination in the future.

## **Conclusion**

The #EndSARS protests caused significant disruptions to tourism infrastructure in Calabar Metropolis, highlighting the sector's vulnerability to socio-political crises. The accommodation sector, particularly hotels, was the most affected, suffering the highest financial losses. These disruptions not only led to a decline in tourist arrivals and revenue but also severely impacted the livelihoods of individuals reliant on tourism-related activities. Job losses, reduced patronage, and increasing insecurity further compounded the socio-economic challenges in the region.

The findings emphasize the urgent need for strategic interventions to rebuild and protect the tourism industry. Strengthening security, investing in resilient infrastructure, and promoting active community engagement are crucial for long-term recovery. Furthermore, promoting domestic tourism and implementing inclusive policy frameworks are essential to revitalizing the sector and safeguarding it from future disruptions. By adopting these measures, Calabar's tourism industry can

recover more robustly and become a key driver of sustainable economic growth and social stability.

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