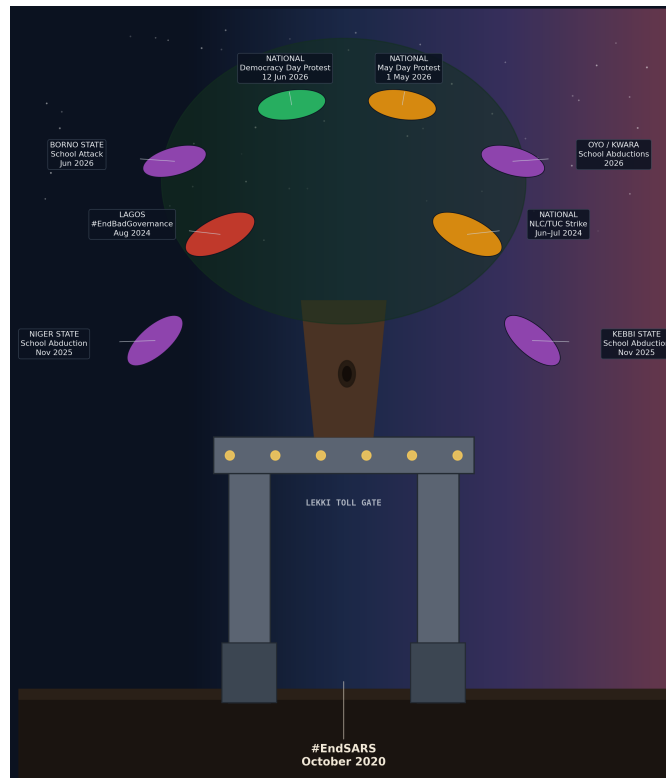


SOCIAL MOVEMENTS · MEDIATION

THE TREE NIGERIA KEEPS CLIMBING

Every protest since 2020 has grown from the same root. Nigeria keeps pruning the leaves, and leaving the knot in the wood untouched.



The CONFLICT TREE's trunk cast in the likeness of the Lekki Toll Gate gantry, where #EndSARS drew blood in October 2020. Every leaf is a protest the tree has since put out; look closely at the trunk, and you will find something the branches have been too busy growing to notice.

“We do not have a shortage of dialogue in Nigeria. We have a shortage of consequences for what dialogue promises.”

— ON THE RECORD OF MEDIATION, 2020–2026

A TREE THAT NEVER STOPS FRUITING

In October 2020, soldiers opened fire on unarmed protesters at the Lekki Toll Gate. **#EndSARS** was meant to be a reckoning, a single, sharp demand to disband a violent police unit. Instead it became a root system. Since then, Nigeria has lived through the **#EndBadGovernance** protests of August 2024, a general strike over the minimum wage, mass school abductions across Niger, Kebbi, Borno, Oyo and Kwara states, and, by mid-2026, back-to-back demonstrations on May Day and Democracy Day. Different leaves. Same tree.

Each episode has produced its own round of mediation, panels of inquiry, wage negotiations, presidential assurances. Each has been declared, at the time, a resolution. And yet the tree keeps fruiting, because the thing that actually failed was never the conversation. It was what happened after the cameras left.

AGREEMENT IS NOT RESOLUTION

Mediation earns its reputation honestly in Nigeria. It disbanded SARS. It produced a ₦70,000 minimum wage settlement in July 2024 that averted a national shutdown. It secured a 2024 ECOWAS Court of Justice ruling ordering reparations for the Lekki shootings. These are not small things.

But five years after #EndSARS, human rights monitors marking the anniversary in October 2025 found the Police Act 2020 only partially implemented and officers implicated in abuse still in service. By May 2026, organised labour was back on the street, arguing that the 2024 wage deal had been quietly eroded by inflation and non-payment in twenty states. The pattern is not that mediation fails to produce agreement. It is that agreement is treated as the finish line, when it is only the starting gun.

WHY THIS MATTERS BEYOND THE HEADLINES

This is not an abstract governance quibble. Every unmonitored settlement is a promise the next generation of protesters will have to make again, at greater cost. Investors read the pattern as instability. Communities read it as bad faith. And young Nigerians, the demographic that built #EndSARS into a movement without leaders, read it as confirmation that the state negotiates only for as long as the cameras are rolling.

A mediation process without enforcement is not neutral. It quietly favours the party with more time to wait out the news cycle. In Nigeria's case, that party is almost never the protester.

THE OTHER SIDE

Some will argue mediation is a distraction from harder structural work, that Nigeria's problem is not a lack of dialogue but a lack of institutions capable of enforcing what dialogue produces. On this view, another round of forums and panels simply buys time for the state to outlast the protest cycle.

That critique is fair, and this paper does not dispute it. But the answer is not less mediation, it is mediation with teeth: independent monitoring, published timelines, and consequences for non-compliance built into the agreement itself, not added afterward as an afterthought.

LOOK AT THE TRUNK, NOT JUST THE LEAVES

Return to the tree. Its canopy is where the attention goes. Each leaf freshly labelled with a new city, a new state, a new hashtag. But the **hole is in the trunk**, concealed in the dark grain where the gantry meets the growth rings: Nigeria has never built a mechanism to enforce what mediation agrees to. No independent monitor. No published timeline. No cost for walking away from a signed commitment. That is the knot nobody has cut open.

Until it is, the tree will keep doing what trees do, putting out new growth every season, in every state, under every new name, while the wound at its centre stays exactly where it has always been.

Mediation does not fail Nigeria. Enforcement does. Build the second, and the first will finally be allowed to work.