
The Influence of Covid-19 on Good Governance and Democratic Behavior in Nigeria

Obieke, Ugochukwu Christian (Main Author)

Social Science Unit, School General Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Awa-Samuel Oluchukwu Mmaobika

Social Science Unit, School of General Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

kekeocha-Christopher, Irene Chinasa

Department of Social Works,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Uba-Uzoagwa Osinachi Peter (Corresponding Author)

Department of Political Science
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract: *“The Research work titled “the influence of Covid-19 on Good governance and Democratic behavior in Nigeria”. Is an investigation which intends to uncover the possible influence of COVID-19 pandemic across nations of the globe showing how it affects the democratic infrastructures of state. The study adopted a descriptive quantitative research method and an explorative research design. The study was built on the conspiracy theory and the findings shows the trends of democracy in Nigeria to be unsatisfactory the part of the government and the efforts of the citizens of the state to protect their democratic rights”*

Keywords: Covid-19, Democracy, Conspiracy, political participation and Election

I. INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus is a large family of virus that causes illness ranging from common cold to more severe diseases such as Pneumonia (WHOa, 2020). During the period of December, 31st 2019 in Wuhan China, it was noted that the world first witnessed the COVID-19 epidemic. This COVID-19 is triggered by SARS-CoV-2, which is a modification of Coronavirus (Fung and Liu, 2021). COVID-19 is considered a respiratory virus that is spread by large respiratory droplets and direct contact with infected secretions. (WHO, 2020). Symptoms of the infection are frequently non-specific, and include fever, cough, and Myalgia, with diarrhoea, with or without the subsequent development of dyspnea (Chan et al., 2020). Harsh cases that consist of respiratory distress, sepsis, and septic shock have been ever more testified with seriously ill patients having need of intubation and intensive care treatments (Wang et al., 2020).

As of the 6th of April 2020, further than 1,244,421 cases have been detected globally, with over 68,976 victims (GOV.UK, 2020). This informs that there appears to be a high transmission rate of the virus (WHOa,

2020). Several measures have been put in place to curb the spread of the virus, this measures includes the lockdown, washing of hands frequently and maintaining social distancing, frequently washing clothes and self, properly cover self, disinfecting Keyboards, doorknobs, cell phone, pager, laptop computers or other devices (Centre for Disease Control, 2021) despite the efforts put in place, According to the Corona Virus Resource centre (2010) The hundreds of thousands and millions of deaths associated with the virus, in countries like the United States of America and other countries is becoming alarming such that many people have lost faith in their government.

These events have largely influence the political behavior and relationship between individuals and their political authority across the globe, in some societies it triggers an authoritarian regime and undemocratic government, in this line of thought Eavi (2021) argues that some leaders intend using covid-19 as an excuse to grab more powers such as Turkey, Hungary and Russia. The Turkish leadership attempts to control the Press meanwhile the Hungarian successfully achieved the enabling act which enables the prime minister to rule by decree for an unlimited period, on the other hand the Russian leadership may be president indefinitely (Center for American Progress, 2021). This has grave disadvantages on political leadership and democracy; for instance, According to the Covid Crime Watch (Online, 2020) Bad decisions are being made, corners are being cut and regulations are being loosened. Large contracts are being given out without competitive tenders or normal due-diligence checks. All of these create opportunities for corruption to thrive. This new trend of corruption has negative effects on the democratic relations in the state.

In some other societies, the occurrence of COVID-19 have great democratic influence, for instance in the United states it was responsible for a regime change from a tight-fist republican government to a more democratic style of the Democrat led by Joe Biden. Now the present investigation seeks to replicate the study to discover if the event of the COVID-19 made a democratic change or was antidemocratic in the Nigerian social political context, this informs the gap the present literature intends to fill

Purpose of the study:

- i. To ascertain if the COVID-19 experience affected the qualities of transparency and accountability on the part of the Nigerian Government
- ii. To ascertain if the COVID-19 experience affected the democratic behavior of citizens in the Nigerian society.

Research Question

- i. Does the COVID-19 experience affect the extent of transparency and accountability on the part of the Nigerian Government
- ii. Does the COVID-19 experience affect the democratic behavior of citizens in the Nigerian society

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 is not new disease but is like an improvement of earlier versions of the virus. Scientific evidence shows that coronaviruses generally originate from animals with various outbreaks at 2006, 2012 etc. but the animal source for the COVID outbreak of December 2019 has not been confirmed yet (WHO, 2020), this suggests arguments that the recent wave of the Virus was produced in the laboratory. Uncertainty, fear and the complexity of the COVID-19 pandemic have fuelled related conspiracy theories. They attempt to ‘explain’ why the pandemic happened and who is benefiting from it. A global study of 28 counties revealed that more than 3 in 10 people surveyed believe that a foreign power or another force is deliberately causing the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Gallup International, March 2020).

Meanwhile others believe it to be the continuum of a cold war between Russia-China block and the Capitalist societies and have even speculated it was engineered as a Bioweapon (Lewis Online, 2020). Most notably the conspiracy theorist accused it as a ploy to use vaccines for the nefarious end of microchipping humans to end democracy. Religious leaders raised further alarm, linking vaccination to Biblical prophecy and the mark of the beast (Olorunfemi, 2020).

Hence, the emergence of the COVID-19 disease is considered as an enemy to world democracy. Democracy on the other hand is the government of the people for the people and by the people (Lincoln, ND). Furthermore, democracy may be explained as the ability of all adult citizens in the state to share decision making powers (Issacharof, 2008) for others democracy is when elected representatives make decisions for others (Day, 2021). The widespread accessibility of the internet is already leading to the rise of so-called digital democracy, whereby ordinary citizens can vote directly on issues and legislative proposals. Many of these voting exercises are taken as indicative and not binding (Schneier, 2001).

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

We secured the approval of the Research, Ethics Committee of the faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Nigeria to conduct this survey, furthermore we ensured the compliance with the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct as set out by the American Psychological Association. The Participant filled the informed consent form in which the researchers also informed them they could withdraw from the survey whenever it pleases them.

The research employs an explorative research design. The Study was carried out in the Nigerian environment and was located in six areas representing the six (6) geopolitical zones of the country. However, the demographics have put the National population at a number of two hundred million (NPA, 2015). The study engaged a stratified random sampling technique. The actual number of cities from where sample is drawn includes Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Maiduguri, Kano and Taraba.

The study sample comprises of 70 respondents from each location to a total of 420 respondents from all locations. It was found that the study sample was adequate using the Taro Yameni Table (1967) with minimum of $n=400$. The criteria of selecting respondents is that they are Nigerians above the age of 18 years old.

Demographics of the Sample

Characteristics	Levels	Participant Group n(%)
Gender	Male	236
	Female	184
Marital Status	Single without Child	189
	Married	167
	Single Parent	64
Academic Achievement	O level Education	292
	Post Secondary Education	128
Geo-political Zone	North East	70
	North west	70
	North Central	70
	South East	70
	South West	70
	South South	70

IV. RESULTS

The data generated from the research survey is here presented in a descriptive statistics, using the statistical tools of the mean and the standard deviation to respond to the two research question of the study on a 2.50 benchmark for acceptance and rejection of item statements. The following tables relays the findings.

Research Question 1:

Does the COVID-19 experience affect the extent of transparency and accountability on the part of the Nigerian Government?

Table 1.0 showing the extent of transparency and accountability on the part of the Nigerian Government during the Covid-19 Pandemic

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Ab-initio, the COVID-19 Palliatives were openly distributed among the populations that comprises the Country	1.7	.51	R
2	Communities and Individuals openly participate in the sharing process of the COVID-19 relief Materials	1.6	.53	R
3	The government of the Nigerian polity enjoys the trust of the Masses	1.60	.47	R
4	Public Office holders takes decisions that represents the interest of the masses	1.95	.72	R
5	The government is willing to accept the criticism from the masses on COVID-19	1.51	.34	R
6	The government stay ethical in their operations and take responsibility to answer emails, calls and requests from members of the public on COVID-19 related issues.	2.05	.75	R

All the items on the list were rejected, since they were below the 2.50 benchmark for acceptance, it implies the government was unaccountable and not transparent in sharing the COVID-19 relief materials.

Research Question 2:

Does the COVID-19 experience affect the democratic behavior of citizens in the Nigerian society?

Table 2.0 describing the COVID-19 influence on the democratic behavior of citizens in the Nigerian society

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Citizens across the country made efforts to be conscious or aware of the happening of the state	3.32	.45	A
2	The Nigerian citizens, largely have their thoughts about government disposition or reaction to the issues of hunger, poverty and suffering institutionalized during the COVID-19 pandemic	3.34	.81	A
3	The citizens across the country voiced their opinion through social media channels	3.24	.72	A
4	Surprisingly, citizens across the country in distaste to government reaction to their plights during COVID-19 stormed the streets to protect their economic rights and bypassed the government to collect their relief materials.	3.37	.62	A
5	For the first time citizens across the country demonstrate their anger with the government by storming the streets to protest against police brutality and protect their legal and social rights during the "End-SARs" protest.	3.44	.54	A
6	Citizens Surprisingly, storm the INEC registration centers to demand for their Permanent Voters Card in order to change the government in the upcoming presidential elections.	3.30	.67	A

All the item statement in the cluster were accepted because it was above the 2.50 benchmark, this implies that after the COVID-19 experience the Nigerian populations became more democratic ranging from political consciousness to participation to secure their economic rights and enforce their political, legal and social rights from a the National outlook.

V. DISCUSSION

From the findings of the Survey the discussion would be divided into two parts which includes the following:

- i. Transparency and accountability of the Nigerian Government during the Covid-19 Pandemic
- ii. The influence of COVID-19 on the democratic behavior of citizens in the Nigerian society

Transparency and accountability of the Nigerian Government during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The information derived from the survey shows that the COVID-19 Palliatives were not openly distributed among the populations that comprises the Country, the Punch (2020) argues that questions are being raised on the accountability of Governors and federal government regarding the disbursement of the COVID-19 relief materials, which stayed unshared until a nationwide panic. On the other hand Eranga (2021) argues that its sharing process became politicized by the respective state governors and the vulnerable have suffered the most.

The survey further shows that Communities and concerned Individuals did not openly participate in the sharing process of the COVID 19 relief materials, this involves an amount of 500 billion Naira set aside to cushion the effect of the Pandemic, in addition the private sector Coalition Against COVID-19 (CACCOVID) emerged to assist government in combating the Coronavirus disease in the Country with a sum of 26 Billion Naira (Punch, 2020), the government also received 3.4 billion US Dollars, and later on 2.3 trillion Naira stimulus (Transparency International, 2020). Transparency international argues that relevant information were hidden, hard to find and inaccessible, hence they requested that the respective state government involved in the act should apologize for not being inclusive in the disbursement of the covid-19 relief materials provided (Punch, 2020).

The findings of the study further showed that the Nigerian people do not trust their government, this confirms the previous findings by Stears Business (2018), who says that Nigerians don't believe their government is fair and that Public Office holders do not make nor are they willing to accept the criticism from the masses, decisions made do not represents the interest of the masses, in confirmation Akoje (2021) states that the government is unnecessarily stubborn and are not considering the plight of the masses.

The findings shows that the government do not stay ethical in their operations and neither do they take responsibility to answer emails, calls and requests from members of the public as it regards their policy during the COVID-19 era. Casmir (2014) has previously stated this is an institutional problem in Nigeria while Gberevbie (2013) has as well found that it has always affected development in Nigeria.

The influence of COVID-19 on the democratic behavior of citizens in the Nigerian society

The survey reveals that Citizens across the country made efforts to be conscious or aware of the happening of the state, The Nigerian citizens, largely have their thoughts about government disposition or reaction to the issues of hunger, poverty and suffering institutionalized during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Human Rights Watch (2021) argues that Nigerians lie between Hunger and the Virus during that event of the virus. The study finds that the citizens across the country voiced their opinion through social media channels. Surprisingly, citizens across the country in anger to government reaction to their plights stormed the streets to protect their economic rights and bypassed the government to collect their relief materials meant for public consumption. Obi-Ani, Anizekwe, Chukwudi and Isiani (2020) argues that Nigerians used social Media Outlet such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Blogs, Online Newspapers and the Youtube to voice their opinion against the mismanagement of the state resources by the government during the Covid-19 incident.

For the first time citizens across the country demonstrate their anger with the government by storming the streets to protest against police brutality and protect their legal and social rights during the "End-SARS" protest. Maclean (2020) reports that the government responded by setting up panels of inquiry into police brutality and the president promised to disband the notoriously abusive police unit known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). In Addition, the Guardian (2021) argues that the Nigerian government responded by aggressive measures with the instruments of Military to kill Nigerian youths at the point of protests, with the death of over 51 civilians.

The new wave of electoral consciousness during the Post-Covid-19 era was when Citizens surprisingly developed some political participant mindset, as they storm the INEC registration centers to demand for their Permanent Voters Card in order to change the government in the upcoming presidential elections. Many argue that the Independent Electoral Commission intends to disenfranchise many Nigerians (Arinze, 2022), they argue that INEC procedure frustrates the efforts of well meaning Nigerians to secure their political rights and are presently suspicious of the Nigerian government and that in some places INEC has locked citizens off from registration (Lasisi, 2022). And presently, citizens are willing to do whatsoever it takes to cast their votes without any form of financial reward. This spells a turn around on the political behavior of the Nigerian Youth.

VI. Conclusion

The study intends to know the possible influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on democracy in Nigeria. The survey finds out that at the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Nigeria were lacking the democratic character of transparency and accountability in the process of governance and the citizens were not carried along in key decision making process such as the deployment of relief materials by the state governments. On the other hand, the citizenry were politically awake and has intensified their extent of political participation by various waves of protests such as the Hoarding of Relief Materials by the government, End-SARS protest and now the PVC registration protest. The extent of Nigeria's political consciousness is at an all-time high after the COVID-19 experience.

Policy Impact

The findings of the research are very important because they capture the effect of the COVID-19 viral outbreak on the political behaviour of the government and the people in Nigeria, as it deeply investigates issues of democracy, which are here discussed:

- The Nigerian government just like the government of Turkey, Hungary and Russia also attempts to take advantage of the COVID-19 era to shortchange transparency and accountability in the process of leadership and engaged into the personalization of the government. Hence, other arms of government should act as the watchdogs to the executive.
- The act of the Nigerian government on the "hoarding COVID-19 relief materials," expresses to what extent they are corrupt and selfish. And reflects the need for accurate checks and Balances on the executives by members of the legislature and Judiciary.
- The response of the Citizens of Nigeria to the activities of the government after the event of the COVID-19 outbreak is considered brave, with a hope of increasing political consciousness among young people.
- The response of the Citizens to the activities of the government after the COVID-19 pandemic, expresses the will of the masses to check the activities of the government and voice their opinion on matters of National interest, hence the government should make themselves available on social media to address the needs of the masses.
- After the event of the COVID-19 experience there is a growth in the level of political participation among the masses, such as protests and a rising movement among the citizens on the registration process to collect their Permanent voters Card in order to exercise their political right. The government should encourage members of the public on their electoral rights by making sure they secure their franchise on time.

Acknowledgement: We hereby appreciate all those that assisted in any way to make this research and publication a success.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare they have no Conflict of interest

REFERENCES

- [1.] Adedokun, N. (2020) COVID-19 why Nigerians don't trust their leaders. Retrieved from <https://www.thecable.ng/covid-19-why-nigerians-don't-trust-their-leaders/amp>
- [2.] Akoje (2021) Okai: President has failed woefully to secure the Nation. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/06/30/okai->
- [3.] Arinze, G. (2022) Youths Protest, Demand More Machines for Voter Registration in Enugu, retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/06/22/youths-protest-demand-more-machines-for-voter-registration-in-enugu/>
- [4.] Center for American Progress (2021) Authoritarian Regime seeks to take advantage of the Corona virus Pandemic. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/autoritarian-regimes-seek-take-advantage-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- [5.] Chan, J.F.W., Yuan, S., Kok, K.H., et al., 2020. A familial cluster of pneumonia associated with the 2019 novel coronavirus indicating person-to-person transmission: a study of a family cluster. Retrieved on 3rd September from the Lancet 395 (10223), 514–523. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)30154-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30154-9).
- [6.] Corona Virus Resource centre, (2010). Maps and Trends: MORTALITY ANALYSES. John Hopkins University. Available at <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>
- [7.] Eavi, (2020) Benefits of COVID-19 for Authoritarian leaders. Retrieved from <https://www.eavi.eu/benefits-of-covid-19-for-authoritarian-leaders/>
- [8.] Eranga, I.O. (2021) COVID-19 Pandemic I Nigeria; Palliative Measures and Politics of Vulnerability retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7359756/>
- [9.] Gberevbie D. E. (2013) Ethical Issues and Quest for Development. Rwanda Journal. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267748923>
- [10.] GOV.UK. Coronavirus (COVID-19): what you need to do. Retrieved on 3rd September from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-background-information/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-epidemiology-virology-and-clinical-features> (accessed 15 April2020).
- [11.] Human Rights Watch (2021) Between Hunger and the Virus the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on people living in poverty in lagos, Nigeria. retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/07/28/between-hunger-and-virus/impact-covid-19-pandemic-people-living-poverty-lagos>
- [12.] Lasisi O. J. (2022) Why Youths find voter registration process frustrating. Retrieved from <https://www.businessday.ng/amp/politics/article/explainer-why-youths-find-voter-registration-process-frustrating/>
- [13.] Maclean (2020) Nigeria Goes offensive Against Youth Protesting Police Brutality. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/world/africa/Nigeria-endSARS-protest.html>
- [14.] Nwakanma C. A matter of Distrust Concundrum for Nigerian Political and Media leaders. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/03/14/a-matter-of-distrust-conundrum-for-nigerian-political-and-media-leaders>
- [15.] Obi-Ani,N., Anizekwe,C., Chukwudi M., and Isiani, M. C. (2020) Social Media and Covid-19 pandemic: observations from Nigeria. Cogents Arts and Humanities. 7(1) 1-15

-
- [16.] Public Sector Corruption in Nigeria: An Ethical and Institutional Framework of Analysis. Retrieved from https://www.scrip.org/html/2-1650233_48543.htm
- [17.] Stears Business (2018), Nigerians do not trust their government. Retrieved from <https://www.stearsng.com/article/Nigerians-do-not-trust-government>
- [18.] The Guardian (2021) Nigerian Youths protest a year after bloody crackdown. Retrieved from <https://www.guardian.ng/news/nigerian-youths-protest-a-year-after-bloody-crackdown/>
- [19.] The Punch (2020) Hoarded COVID-19 palliatives put governors under the spotlight. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/amp/s/punchng.com/hoarded-covid-19-palliatives-put-governors-under-the-spotlight/%3famp>
- [20.] Transparency International (2021) IMF COVID-19 Emergency loans: a view from four countries <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/imf-covid-19-emergency-loans-cameroon-ecudor-egypt-nigeria>.
- [21.] Wang, C., Horby, P.W., Hayden, F.G., et al., 2020. A novel coronavirus outbreak of global health concern. *The Lancet* 395 (10223), 470–473. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(20\)30185-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30185-9).
- [22.] World Health Organization (2020) Europe Emergencies: Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic. Situations. <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>
- [23.] World Health Organization. Depression. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression> (accessed 15 April 2020).
- [24.] Fung, S. and Liu, D. X. (2021) Similarities and Dissimilarities of COVID-19 and other Coronavirus Diseases. *Annual Review of Microbiology*, Vol. 75: 19-47