

COVID-19, TRUST AND GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: A TRIANGLE OF CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

The deadly new coronavirus that was first discovered in Wuhan China in 2019 soon became a global pandemic spreading throughout different nations of the world including Nigeria. A gap in literature is on the effect of governance on the fight against the Virus. This research therefore examines ethically the effects of trust and governance on the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria. Data for this research were collected through secondary sources and were analyzed qualitatively. Findings revealed that to curtail the spread of the virus, the Nigerian government, developed protocols, introduced lockdown measures and procured vaccines to be administered free to her citizens. Bad governance over the years has led to distrust of the government's claims on the existence of the Virus in the country and its sincerity in the fight against the Virus. This has led to the development of different conspiracy theories about the virus, a large scale violation of the protocol developed by the government, poor uptake of the vaccine, increase in the number of infections, a rise in the death toll, the emergence of new strain of the virus and a waste of government resources, further exposing governments inadequacies and leading to more bad governance, thereby creating a triangle of consequences. It is recommended that the Nigerian government should do more to win the trust of its citizens by being more transparent in its dealings, show proper accountability and get the people more involved in governance as a means of achieving better governance.

Keywords: COVID- 19, Trust, governance, consequences, Nigeria.

Introduction

The new Coronavirus also known as COVID 19 which causes respiratory infection with symptoms that include breathlessness, fever, cough, loss of sense of taste and smell and in severe cases could lead to death was discovered in China in the year 2019. The dreaded virus that is transmitted from person to person when a non-infected person comes in contact with formites released by an infected person through coughing or sneezing soon spread from china to other nations of the world. The new coronavirus also known as COVID-19 became a major public health concern with rising cases of infection and death from the virus across the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19a public health emergency of international concern on 30th January 2020 and a pandemic on 11th March 2020 (Wikipedia). As

a result different nations of the world developed measures to control the spread of the virus within their territory. These measures include the imposition of lock down and the development of protocol containing guidelines that citizens were expected to follow. Researches into the development of vaccines were also commissioned by different nations and institutions. Vaccines that were found to be safe were approved by the WHO and accepted by different nations of the world to be administered to their citizens, with many nations recording success with procurements, distribution, administration and uptake of the Vaccine. The Nigerian index COVID-19 case was discovered in February 2020. The cases have continued to rise with thousands of confirmed cases and many deaths. Nigeria like other nations imposed lockdown measure and developed protocol to check the spread of the Virus. Vaccines were also procured and distributed to be administered free to citizens. However, compliance to these measures and uptake of the vaccine has been noted to be low (Okwuosa, 2021). Scholarship has focused mainly on the causes (Bridgman et al. 2020, Alcantara-Ayala et al 2021, Illesanmi et al 2020) and socioeconomic (Ozili, 2020, Celik and Dane 2020, d'Orville 2020) impact of the pandemic. The impact of trust and governance on the efforts of government in the fight against the virus has received very little scholarly attention. This research is aimed at ethically analyzing the impact of trust and governance in Nigeria on the fight against COVID-19. The concept of governance in Nigeria shall be discussed with attention paid to the meaning and effects of good governance and bad governance in the Nation, the issues of trust and governance in Nigeria shall also be discussed and the effect of trust and governance on the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria shall be presented. These shall be subjected to ethical analyzes and recommendations shall be made.

Methods

A qualitative research method was adopted for this research using mainly secondary sources to generate data for this study. Searches were conducted in Google scholar as shown in the table below. Participant observation was also used as an added source of data gathering. Consequential theory of ethics was used for the ethical analysis of the findings.

TABLE 1: GOOGLE SCHOLAR SEARCHES

SN	Date	Search words	No of hits	No Selected
1	14/5/21	Trust and governance in Nigeria	220,000	10
2	29/5/21	Covid 19 and governance in Nigeria	3270	7
3	31/5/21	Nigeria and COVID-19	67,800	5
4	31/5/21	Uptake of COVID-19 vaccine in Nigeria	3010	4

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to select relevant articles for the research as follows:

Inclusion criteria

1. Articles published not later than year 2000
2. Articles that are peer reviewed or are undergoing review
3. Full text Articles available free online

Exclusion criteria

1. Articles published before year 2000.
2. Articles that were not peer reviewed
3. Full text not available

Some papers however which do not fall under these criteria but are considered to be very relevant where also cited.

The concept of Governance in Nigeria

Governance according to the World Bank refers to how power is exercised in the management of a nation's economic and social resources for developmental purposes (World Bank, 2000). Governance is the means for achieving directions, control and coordination of wholly or partially autonomous individual or organizations on behalf of interests to which they jointly contribute. (Lynn et al, 2000 cited in Ademola, 2009). Governance is the process and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. It includes how government is selected, held accountable, monitored and replaced with an emphasis on the capacity of government to manage resources and respect the rule of law. Okunade (2000) summarily opines that governance is the activities and process of governing not necessarily about outcomes but how such outcomes are reached.

UNDP(1997) views good governance as encompassing the exercise of political, economic, legal judicial, social and administrative authority in a manner that meets the aspirations and needs of the citizens. This include; the government, the private sector and the civil society. Factors for measuring good governance include; safety and rule of law, participation as human right, sustainable economic opportunity and human development (Yusuf, 2014). Good governance entails the capacity to manage a country's resource in a transparent, accountable, and equitable manner, in response to the needs of the people (Adeosun, 2012). Good governance is a high level organizational effectiveness in relation to policy formulation and the policy actually pursued especially in the conduct of economic policy and its contribution to growth stability and public welfare (Healey and Robinson, 1994). Good governance should be concerned with an effective process of management of public affairs, which embraces the normal basis of political authority and the essential demands for peace, order and stability. It demands that government be responsive and responsible to its citizens. Good governance must be associated with accountability, transparency and legitimacy. Transparency carries with it a powerful array of moral and political associations including honesty, guilelessness and openness (Best, 2005). Good governance is a necessary condition for social, political and economic development in any society because it creates an environment in which everyone unfold his/her productive, political and cultural potential. It is one of the international standards required of government to be recognized in the global community (Gberevbie and Latenwa, 2007). Good governance, efficiency and effective public administration have been noted to be necessary conditions to achieving sustainable development (Kim et al, 2005). Good governance ensures sustainable human development, mass participation and economic empowerment and poverty reduction. Good governance encompasses basic freedom, which includes accountability competence, the reign of the rule of law and the absence of human rights abuses (Nwagbara, 2003). Good governance base on its importance is considered crucial to the well being and development of a society (Muhammed and Dalilan, 2020).

Adenugba (2013) suggest the following parameters for measuring good governance; managerial and organizational efficiency, accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness to the public, transparency in decision- making and pluralism in policy options and choices. Monique, et al (1998) in discussing the theory of good governance observes that accountability, control, responsiveness, transparency, public participation, re-economy efficiency as being essential elements of the theory of good governance. The existence of these elements in any act of governance makes it good and the absence of these elements makes governance bad.

The Nigerian state views good governance strongly and considers it key to the development of the 1999 Nigerian constitution as amended as shown in the preamble to the constitution:

We the people of the federal republic of Nigeria (FRN), having firmly and solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God ... and to provide a constitution for the purpose of promoting **good governance** and welfare of all persons in our country on the principles of freedom equity and justice (The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Despite this, governance in Nigeria can be said to be far from good. Adegami and Adepoju (2017) observe that transparency and accountability have not been given the attention it deserves in Nigeria despite its importance to good governance and national development. Ademola (2009) further observes that since the inception of democracy in 1999 there have been issues in accountability in governance in Nigeria with the primary concerns of elected representative being justification for looting public treasury and for searching for political enemies both real and imagined. Ethnic, religious and tribal sectionalism have hindered good governance in Nigeria since independence. The opposite of good governance include; unaccountability, bureaucracy, unjust legal system, corruption in high and low places, mismanagement of public resources and civil strife in a society (Gberevbie and Letenwa, 2017). These are all pervasive in the Nigerian nation. And in addition nepotism is also endemic in the governance of the nation especially since the inception of the present administration.

Yusuf (2014) notes the following as indicators for poor governance:

- i. Prevalence of poor service delivery
- ii. Ineffective public complaint mechanism
- iii. Ineffective anti corruption mechanism
- iv. Lack of faith in the integrity of public office holders
- v. Lack of effective public participation in policy making
- vi. General corruption in all sphere of public life due to materialistic value/poverty
- vii. Heightened insecurity

These indicators no doubt are very evident in Nigeria and it is clear to virtually all Nigerians that governance in the country is bad. The legislative arm have become an institution of corrupt practices engaged in self serving, marketing instead of making laws and being instrument of checks for bad governance. The current developmental crisis in the Nigerian

nation could be attributed to a history of poor governance characterized by corruption and social injustice (Yusuf, 2014). Bad governance affects a nation negatively, some of its effect on the Nigerian nation as observed by Yusuf (2014) include: unemployment, high cost of living, inflation, lack of adequate business financing, poor infrastructure, endemic public sector corrupt practices and pervasive poverty. Adegbam and Adepoju (2017) further notes the rise in insecurity, debt, declining industries, unemployment, falling standard of education, violence, loss of lives and properties, lack of social infrastructure and amenities such as road, water and electricity and poor health facilities as effects of bad governance in Nigeria.

Trust and Governance

Khan (2007) cited in Iroghama (2012) notes that public trust in government is essential to achieving the triangle of freedom, stability, peace and development. This means that for a nation to experience stability peace and development there has to be trust for the leadership. Trust enhances confidence in institutions and consequently attracts cooperation of citizens to the agreed policies and program. Corruption has been noted to be a major determinant of citizen's trust or distrust in government. This means that a government that is noted to be sincere in its fight against corruption will be trusted more than a government that pays only lip service to its fight against corruption. Gbervbie and Nchekwube (2014) observe that good governance in a nation is the relative absence of corruption in its entire ramification. Other factors that determine trust in governance include; economic performance, misappropriation of public funds and political participation. Lack of trust has a number of effects in governance. It could lead to political instability as is being experienced in Nigeria. It could also lead to erosion of public confidence. It has also been found to lead to loss of legitimacy of government. Furthermore it could pose a challenge to the working of governments (Iroghama 2012). Levi (1998) cited in Gbervbie and Nchekwube (2014) sees a link between the peoples trust for government and the governments trust for the people by noting that perception that the government is untrustworthy is a function not only of its failure to fulfill promises but also of evidence that government agents distrust those from whom they are demanding cooperation and compliance. This view is also collaborated by Yang (2005) cited in Gbervbie and Nchekwube (2014) who argues that for citizens trust for the government to improve , governments trust for the citizens must also improve. Trust in this light is seen to be a two-way traffic; citizens trust government and government trust citizens. The lopsided appointments in the present administration in Nigeria with key organs of government being manned by persons from one divide of the nation shows that the governments in power has trust issues. The statement credited to the president as saying that "Nigerian youths are lazy" further shows the government lack of trust for its citizens. This therefore explains in part why there is distrust for governance in the nation.

Yusuf (2014) argues that Nigerians do not trust the leadership of the nation because some political leaders at all levels rigged their way into the position they occupy and become insensitive, public bureaucrats shrouded in misadministration and parading themselves as leaders. Exposed public misappropriations of public funds are left without being sanctioned or punished. As shown above, Transparency and accountability are factors that should build trust in governance. The lack of it inspires distrust for government by citizens. Poor governance has led Nigerians to perceive the government as unreliable propagandist which cannot be trusted for its words (Adegbam and Adepoju, 2017). Okere et al (2020) also notes

that there is mistrust about government among Nigerian citizens. Accountability, transparency and respect for the rule of law which are key factors for good governance and for trust in governance are lacking among several government officials in Nigeria.

Covid 19, Trust and Governance in Nigeria

Fehintola and Fehintola (2020) notes some impact of COVID-19 on Nigerians to include; hunger, lawlessness, arm robbery, economic crisis, political crisis, financial problem and hike in the price of essential commodities, increased use of hard drugs by young adults, rape, increase pool betting and internet fraud. The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt exposed the federal government inadequacy in its accountability and transparency of governance (Abubakar, 2020). Akwu, Uweh and Okon (2020) asserts that the efforts put in place by the government to combat the pandemic could not yield much fruits due to lack of infrastructural development evidenced in bad roads, poor healthcare facilities, poor power supply, poor educational facilities and inadequate employment opportunities. The proper functioning of the health sector, education sector, transportation, housing sector, road infrastructure and economy for job opportunities would have created sufficient buffers and resilience against COVID-19. In other words bad governance poses serious obstacles to the government's fight against COVID-19.

A number of conspiracy theories have developed around Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria. One of such theories is the belief that it does not exist in Nigeria; it is rather the government's strategy for diverting public funds to their private pockets. This is largely due to low public trust on governance. Another conspiracy theory is that the COVID-19 is a disease for the rich and elite. This is arising from the news of celebrities, elites and highly placed government officers that tested positive and even died from COVID-19 (Campbell 2020). Furthermore the lower class in Nigeria considers government regulations a sham, thus increasing the rate of community transmission of the virus in Nigeria (Campbell and McCaslin, 2020). Some Nigerians see COVID-19 as a biological weapon designed by the Chinese government others see it as a plague caused by sin and unbelief (Oladapegba et al, 2020). Basically these theories are further pointers to the high level distrust for the government by the citizens. Despite the efforts of the government that has direct effect on virtually all citizens, the citizens would still have these theories pervading in their midst. Very little was done by government to debunk theories on social and traditional media that the African continent was immune to COVID-19 due to the climate condition present therein. These are reasons for lack of confidence in the government following reports of COVID-19 in Africa.

Akinyemi et al (2021) reported high vaccine hesitation in a survey conducted in a part of Nigeria. This might delay the ability to curb the spread of the disease. This might be taken care of by improved knowledge and addressing common misconception about the disease. A number of factors have been found to be responsible for vaccine hesitation: public distrust in the COVID-19 outbreak response on the African continent attributes to delay response activity by the government of many African countries and public health experts. The Nigeria government demonstrated laxity in the implementation of borders' closure; top politicians ensured the exit of their relatives from COVID-19 high risk countries such as China, Germany and the United States of America to Africa. This act that led to importation of the virus was

not appreciated by many. Also community involvement was lacking while social distancing, hand hygiene and other COVID-19 control measures were being implemented.

The effect of vaccine hesitation according to Afolabi and Ilesanmi (2021) include; increased vulnerability of unimmunized children in large urban centers to the measles outbreak. The polio vaccine boycott in 2003-2004 prompted by distrust and fallacies resulted to a four-fold increase in the polio incidence in Nigeria between 2002 and 2006, and increased polio outbreak in three non- African continents. Due to the wrong perception of religious leaders the polio vaccine was rejected in the northern Nigeria. Vaccine hesitation pose threat to individual personal and global health as it delays the attainments of herd immunity for specific illnesses.

Consequentialism and the Effects of Trust and Governance on COVID-19 in Nigeria

Ethics examines the rightness or wrongness of an action or inaction as it affects the person performing the action, the person(s) to which the action is being performed and the environment where the action is being performed. Consequential theory of ethics evaluates the effect of an action based on its consequences. It holds that the consequence of one's conduct is the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of the action. A morally right action from a consequentialist point of view therefore is the one that produces a good outcome. An action that produces a bad outcome is morally wrong (Wikipedia). This theory best analysis the ethical implications of the effect of governance on the fight against COVID-19 in Nigeria. Good governance produces trust from the people while bad governance produces distrust, the impact of these on the fight against COVID-19 forms our ethical reflection.

The act of governance produces a response from the people which could be either positive or negative depending on the nature of the governance. Good governance produces trust while bad governance produces distrust. Trust and distrust define to a large extent the people's response to government policies and interventions. The Nigerian government have done so much to fight the virus by putting up a lot of measures and resources both human and material, yet the peoples response to this have been far from satisfactory as noted above. Bad governance over the years in Nigeria has brought about massive distrust for governance and its policies by the people. The failures of government at the act of governance has now translated to widespread disregard for its policies, protocols and guidelines aimed at reducing the spread of the virus resulting in increasing cases of new infections, development of new variant strains of the virus, death and the wasting of government scarce resources. This in-turn have negative consequences on governance which includes, exposing the governments inadequacies further leading to negative assessment of governance by the people and further distrust. Furthermore a strain in the available resources for governance shall further make the government unable to provide the amenities that make for good governance as has been shown above, this invariably leads to more bad governance which leads to further distrust and further set back in the fight against the virus. This create a "triangle of consequences" as shown in the diagram below:

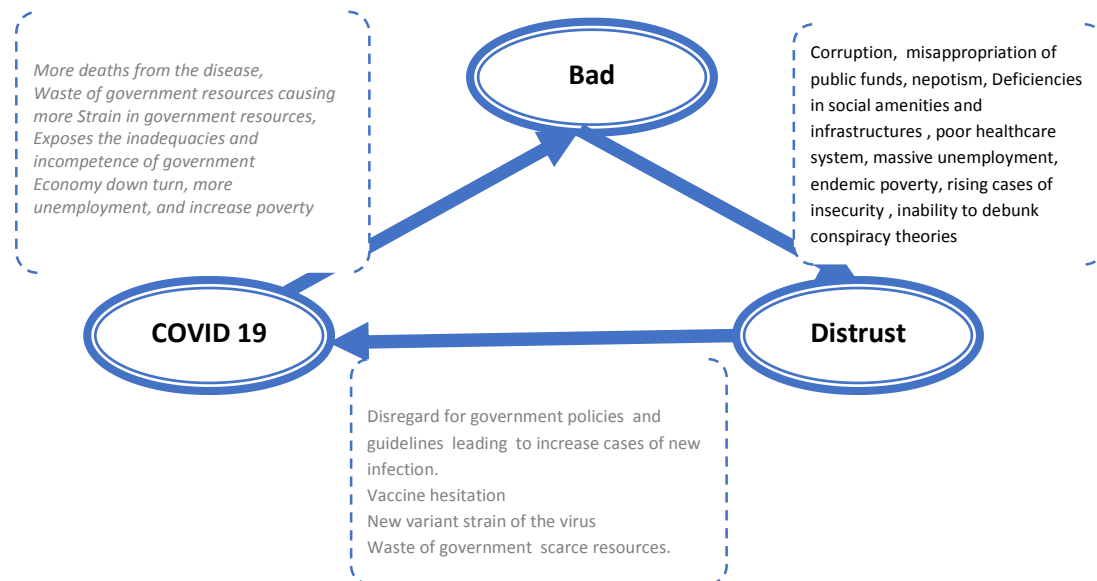


Fig.Triangle of consequences, (Author)

Conclusion and recommendations

From the consequences arising from governance in Nigeria one could safely conclude that governance in Nigeria have so far produced negative outcomes in the fight against COVID-19. The wrongchoices made by our leaders have led the nation into further harm. The need therefore to rethink governance in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. Those saddled with the responsibility of governance should henceforth weigh carefully their choices as this has been shown to directly impact the wellbeing of the nation. In consideration of this therefore we put forward the following recommendations:

1. Government should be seen to be more transparent and accountable. Transparency and accountability should form the watch word of the government in Nigeria. The government should ensure proper transparency in all its dealings and proper accounting should be given for all government resources and procedures.
2. The fight against corruption should be taken seriously. It is not enough to talk about fighting corruption; the government should rather be seen to walk its talk. Corrupt government officials should be made to face the wrath of the law no matter who they are. There must not be “sacred cows” in this matter.
3. The provision of basic infrastructure which include road, electricity, water and healthcare should form the main focus of government.
4. There should be respect for the rule of law. No one should be seen to be above the law and the policies of government should be made to go through due process. Government should be seen to work according to the dictates of the law of the nation.
5. Government should employ a more effective means of communicating its policies and activities to the people. Religious and community leaders should form strong allies for this communication. Town hall meetings should be encouraged among all sectors of government and participation should be encouraged and motivation given.
6. The people should be more involved in governance. The idea of leaving governance in the hands of a few individuals has proven to be inadequate. Mass participationin

governance should be encouraged by developing means of obtaining the views of the masses on government policies and procedures and implementing these views.

7. Merit should be promoted in governance and mediocrity discouraged. The best hands should be engaged to man government institutions irrespective of tribe, religion or political affiliation.
8. Strategies for preventing the occurrence of COVID-19 vaccine hesitation in Africa include: community participation in the structure and the structure and modalities for vaccine delivering this shall dispel false report on the COVID-19 vaccine and ensure health education on the benefit of the COVID-19 vaccine; secondly it shall contribute to an increase update of the vaccine. Feedback mechanism by acknowledging community efforts in previous health interventions for successes and previous support on previous vaccination exercises. Community and religious leaders have to be appreciated. Multi- sectoral collaboration is also needed. Collaboration of the public and private sectors in the funding of the vaccine is needed. Integration of the prospective COVID-19 vaccine into the existing healthcare services further presents a promising strategy of overcoming vaccine hesitation to improve vaccine uptake.

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