

Good Governance, Bad Governance: The Politics of Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the influence of good governance on coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria. The kernel of this article is the intrinsic nexus between good governance, bad governance and coronavirus pandemic in a democratic state. It reviews articles on how democracy has influenced good governance and/or promotes bad governance. It examines the individual perspective and understanding of the virus, state of lockdown and the welfare of the populace by the political leaders; to what extent is the palliative being distributed among other welfare packages useful to the populace. The paper clearly explained the notion of good governance in the context of the Nigerian milieu and links it with how welfare of the citizens could assist in building their confidence. The paper provided evidence from around the world of the nexus between the three variables under examination and it shows that there is a yawning gap in trust and accountability between citizens and the government because the need of the populace has overtime been ignored and neglected by government. This is evident in that Nigeria is yet to comply with the inextricable indices of good governance due to lack of trust and committed leadership. The paper recommended amongst others that government and political leaders, as well as the institutions in the country, must strive to promote participatory, consensus-oriented, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency; equitable, inclusive and follows the rule of law to deliver good governance in Nigeria, and Africa in general. The paper is segmented to include introduction, problem statement, contextual discourse and conclusion.

KEYWORDS: democracy, good governance, bad governance, Coronavirus pandemic, populace, Nigeria

Introduction

Governance is the strategic task of setting the organization's goals, direction, limitations and accountability framework. Good governance has elements which are considered essential for community to achieve its objectives and drive improvement, as well as maintain legal and ethical standing in the eyes of populace, organizations, and the wider community. It increases public engagement in managing risks and promoting neighborhood security, increases likelihood of all income groups surviving disasters; reduces crime rate, reduces environmental and health impacts of disasters caused by human actions; increases environmental security. This is evident that government has an important role to play in the management of health issue of the populace. Governance is assigned with the role of providing and assuring an adequate health infrastructure, promotion of healthy communities and healthy behaviors, prevention of the spread of communicable diseases, protection against environmental health hazards, preparation for and responding to emergencies, and assuring health services which include the current pandemic around the world.

In December 2019, a novel strain of coronavirus—SARS-CoV-2—was first detected in Wuhan, a city in China's Hubei province with a population of 11 million, after an outbreak of pneumonia without an obvious cause. The virus has now spread to over 200 countries and territories across the globe, and it is been characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020 due to the rapid increase in the number of cases outside China which has affected a growing number of countries around the world. This pandemic has cast a new light on the role that government plays in keeping citizenry healthy which implies that stable and effective government must be crucial to managing the coronavirus pandemic.

Coronavirus pandemic calls for government investment in promoting healthy communities and healthy behaviors means activities that improve health in a population, such as engagement of communities on changing of policies, provision of information and education on healthy communities or population health status; systems or environments to promote positive health or prevent adverse health; and addressing issues of health equity and disparities, and the social determinants of health as early prevention is essential in preventing and managing the disease. Audacious policy action to maintain functioning healthcare systems, guarantee the continuity of education, preserve businesses and jobs, and maintain the stability of financial market is required in the management of such crises and addressing their socio-economic consequences. It is therefore evident that to sustain the complex political, social and economic balance of adopting containment measures to reduce the impact of the pandemic while ensuring the provision of essential services, political leadership at the centre is essential. In order to maintain citizens' trust in government, such leader is essential.

Ozili (2020) submitted that some Nigerians have misconceptions about COVID-19, they believe it is a biological weapon of the Chinese government, many considered the pandemic as a hoax, some describes it as political gimmick by politicians to loot the treasury while others see it as a 'rich man's disease'. These misconceptions prevented them from taking maximum preventive measures not even when the government is at the centre of making policies about it. Hence, there is a need for evidence-based campaign which should be intensified to remove misconceptions and promote precautionary measures by government. Nigerian populace believes that their government has ignored and abandoned them, now the government needs the populace whose needs have largely been ignored for decades.

The neglect and abandonment also reflected in the palliative measures being rolled out during the lockdown when citizens were asked to stay in their homes while businesses and offices, national and international borders were been shut down. Eranga (2020) submitted that to alleviate the effects of the lockdown, the Federal Government of Nigeria rolled out palliative measures for targeted groups and lamentations have trailed the distribution of government palliatives by the masses. Citizens alleged that the process of distribution of palliatives is been politicized, although the Federal Government claimed that the palliative is for vulnerable. The salient question is what parameters are been adopted in determining the vulnerable or who are these vulnerable people?

Based on this, to what extent will the populace trust their government who failed to meet the needs of society while making use of their resources, government that lack transparency, integrity, lawfulness, sound policy, participation, accountability, responsiveness, and the absence of corruption and wrongdoing in the management and prevention of this pandemic? It is on this basis that this study examines the influence of good and bad governance on the management and prevention of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

Good Governance

The state is been defined by the need to protect and ensure life and survivability and this can only be achieved by good governance. Different meaning of good governance exists; the term is generally associated with political, economic and social goals that are deemed necessary for achieving development. Hence, the act of public institutions to conduct public affairs and manage public resources in a manner that will promote the rule of law and the realization of human rights is known as good governance. Elements of good governance must be taken into cognizance not only to achieve sustainable development but human well-being.

System of governance that is committed to protecting human rights and civil liberties whereby the populace has a voice in decision-making which directly or indirectly represent their interests is known as Good Governance. In essence, there is a great nexus between good governance and democracy that is presently been a practice in Nigeria. But researches (Ujomu

2004) have shown that lack of element of good governance even in democracy being about massive deterioration of government institutions, pervasive poverty and alarming unemployment rate, corruption, as well as near total collapse of moral and ethical standards engendered by nearly three decades of military rule in the country, which saw governance capacity weakened at all levels.

In 1996, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared that "promoting good governance in all its aspects, including by ensuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector and tackling corruption, [are] essential elements of a framework within which economies can prosper." Today, the term good governance has become popular and commonly used by national and international development organizations around the world. However, its meaning and scope are vague and not always clear while this flexibility enables a contextual application of the term, the lack of conceptual clarity can be a source of difficulty at the operational level. Nigeria is lacking in good governance and leadership; without mincing words, good governance will breed good leadership and it will solve the problems of governance in Nigeria. Johnston (2002) corroborate this submission that good governance in some cases has become a "one-size-fits-all buzzword" lacking specific meaning and content.

Good governance is linked with rule of law, transparency and accountability whereby legal frameworks should be fair and enforced impartially and enough information is provided in embodying partnership between state and society, and among citizens. Johnston (2002) submitted that good governance is legitimate, accountable, and effective ways of obtaining and using public power and resources in the pursuit of widely accepted social goals. On a similar note, Rose-Ackerman (2016) suggests that good governance refers to all kinds of institutional structures that promote both good substantive outcomes and public legitimacy. Good government is also associated with impartiality (Rothstein and Varraich 2017), ethical universalism (Mungiu-Pippidi 2015) and open-access orders (North, Wallis and Weingast 2009). This, therefore, shows implies openness and accessibility are essential among leaders in governance in order to promote good governance.

State of Governance

Governance is defined by the World Bank as "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development". The essence of modern governance has transcended the desire for security against physical or military aggression to defense against basic social and economic insecurity. The right to choose who leads in any society is a principal ingredient in what is today referred to as democracy (Mato 2005).

The role of government in every society is the creation of necessary enabling environment for the facilitation of good life and universal acceptance of democracy, as the best system of governance is incontestable (Leke 2010). It is sad that despite Nigeria being a sovereign state for over 60 years, with an abundance of natural resources at the country's disposal, the lives of the Nigerian populace has not been transformed as a result of bad and inept leadership that has always been at the helm of her affairs.

The government of a democratic country is accountable to the people. It has the responsibility to fulfill its end of the social contract, while public officials (political office holders and civil servants) are social servants; they serve society and the population. It is the responsibility of government to ensure equality and promote fundamental human rights. Heyman (2014) refers to the logic behind the historical Bill of Rights and insists that those who drafted the Bill of Rights were not insistent that government might do too little but that it might actually engage in so much responsibility. Therefore, governance is involved in the process of achieving all these lofty goals of liberty and societal good. It is evident that governance in Nigeria lacks the core elements identified in literature in defining good governance.

Without mincing words, the Nigerian State has witnessed an increasing buildup of authoritarian structure and institutions as well as human right abuses despite her democratic nature. The resultant unstable political atmosphere has continued with poor social infrastructure to frighten off local and foreign investors (Leke 2010). To promote good governance in Nigeria, the Nigerian government should give voice to the populace irrespective of class whether majority or minority. Because, the core elements of good governance according to (Rothstein and Teorell 2008) are participatory; consistent with the rule of law; transparent; responsive; consensus-oriented; equitable and inclusive; effective and efficient; and accountable. The literatures has shown that when political systems do not adhere to these eight principles, their institutions might be incapable of delivering public services and fulfil people's needs.

Efforts to improve governance in Nigeria due to the state of governance have been conceptualized as quest for good governance. The underline elements of the concept of good governance are the idea that accountability, transparent, and inclusive governance is both the best promoter and the best producer development. Good governance embodied three domains of governance: the government, the private sector, and civil society. These three strives to ensure collaboration among them. To Sawyer (2004), good governance initiatives are designed to improve governance competence and measure should be taken to strengthen all aspects of governance. This is suffice to say that, good governance cannot be achieved in isolation, there must be cooperation between all the arms of governance in order to achieve their goals.

This is the reason why good governance has been described as participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It also ensures that corruption is minimized, the views of the minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. It is also responsive to the present future needs of society. Nigeria performs below expectation on of welfare of citizens. Fadakinte (2013) submitted that if commitment to public good by efficient delivery of services to the people for the enhancement of the citizen's welfare is what defines good governance, then the last eighteen years in Nigeria has witnessed nothing but bad governance which breeds social vices in the society. This therefore shows that governance in Nigeria has been defined by lack of accountability - checks and balances and has not given voice to the populace but promotes corruption.

State of Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has become an important health threat wreak havoc on the entire world with numerous health and economic implications. Nigeria is also one of the vulnerable African nations, given the weak state of the healthcare system (Marbot 2020). The pandemic shocked the world, overwhelming the health systems without excluding high-income countries. Predictably, the situation has elicited social and medical responses from the public and government, respectively. Nigeria recorded an imported case from Italy on February 27, 2020.

The virus, SARS Cov2 is the main causative organism of COVID-19, with shortness of breath, dry cough and fever as its most common symptoms. The disease is basically transmitted from person to person through contact with droplet of an infected person. Recovering from coronavirus pandemic is easy for most people without specialized treatment except people who are older and those with pre-existing and underlining medical conditions such as cancer, chronic respiratory infections, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are more likely to experience severe illness and death.

Numerous preventive and control measures have been applied globally to contain the disease since its outbreak, but it is ordinarily difficult to prevent and control. The best way of thwarting it is by adopting measures that will reduce exposure to the virus that causes the disease (CDC, 2020). This therefore makes the government and political leaders at the centre of management and control of this disease put some directives and preventive measures to battle

the virus. Research according to (Amzat, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundairo, and Danjibo 2020) submitted that the pre-COVID-19 preparedness was grossly inadequate.

This, therefore, correspond with the submission that many health experts projected that Africa would face a hard time and struggle to keep the coronavirus outbreak under control once it is confirmed on the continent. The concerns were based on pervasive poverty, weak healthcare system, and the diseases ravaging most parts of Africa, Nigeria inclusive. Although, the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) submitted that the training of the rapid response teams across the 36 states including the FCT in Nigeria was concluded on December 2019. On January 28, the NCDC further revealed that a Coronavirus Prevention Group had been set up to activate its incident system to respond to any emergency. Additionally, the NCDC worked with 22 states in Nigeria to activate their emergency operations centers to manage and link up with the national incidence coordination centers (Ihekweazu 2020). Although it was reported that the government had strengthened the surveillance at the airport since January 2020, Nigeria recorded its COVID-19 index case that was imported from Italy, on February 27. This raised concerns about the effectiveness of airport surveillance and, by extension, the country's general preparedness. The index case (an Italian) had visited some other states of the federation before testing positive for COVID-19.

Among other measures taken to manage the pandemic is testing and isolation of confirmed positive cases, sensitization of the masses on COVID-19 as well as various ways of preventing the disease, using all sources of information, dissemination including the radio, television, print and social media. People were also encouraged to regularly wash their hands, use hand sanitizers, use face mask in public and inhibit good reparatory hygiene. In order to ensure complete compliance to the directives on lockdown, which are; social distancing, use of face masks and sanitizers, different state governments constituted taskforces to ensure that people in their respective states do not default. Despite all these measures being put in place, there is still steady increase in the number of cases as well as number of affected states most especially with this second phase. This therefore support of the submission of Amzat et al. (2020) that these plans are grossly inadequate which may result from non-compliant. This is the reason why the Federal Government of Nigeria signed the bill on the use of facemask into law. Although, the studies of (Ibekwe 2020, Mac-Leva et al. 2020) also submitted that the existing health facilities and equipment (including ventilators and PPE) in Nigeria are grossly inadequate to handle the medical emergency of COVID-19 due to the number of reported cases overwhelming the health system.

Good or bad governance and Management of Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria

The importance of good governance as a critical condition for human development can no longer be under estimated. Since the late 1980s governance has been reported to be a subject of considerable debates and different interpretations by governments, international organizations and scholars. Managing and mitigating the effect of coronavirus pandemic depend on the state building trust with its citizens through effective communication and actions which can only be achieved by good governance and not bad governance. Good Governance is an approach to government committed to creating a system that protects human rights and civil liberties while bad governance is the negative consequence of this been defined by corruption in Nigerian society.

The concepts of corruption and good governance have a two-way causal relationship with each other and feed off each other in a vicious circle. If good governance principles and structures are not in place, this provides greater opportunity for corruption. Corruption, in turn, can prevent good governance principles and structures from being put in place, or enforced. Violations of the principles of transparency, accountability and rule of law appear to be most closely associated with corruption. Evidence from literature emphasized the importance of

principles of transparency and accountability on dissemination of information on coronavirus pandemic by government. Olagoke, Olagoke, and Hughes (2020) submitted that the public's trust in the government's, risk communication and social persuasion strategies may affect their perception of the pandemic's severity, their vulnerability to the virus and their perceived self-efficacy in practicing preventive behavior or taking care of their health. This therefore shows that corruption and poor governance are not only security challenges which undermine democracy, the rule of law and economic development but also health challenges.

Hetherington (2005) argues that low level of trust undermines the capacity of government to pursue redistributive policies. Marien and Hooghe (2011) also opined that trust increases law compliance. Ineffective institutions undermine the provision of public services such as health care, education and law enforcement. Looting of Covid-19 aids is an example of distrust on governance in Nigeria where the State governors have said the items looted were kept for vulnerable members of society and in preparation for a possible second wave of coronavirus infections. The salient question needed to be raised is this, how many Nigerians benefitted from the initial distribution of the first palliative distribution? What measure are been considered in distributing the palliative for the so-called vulnerable by the government? Who are the vulnerable? When people under restriction of movement have exposed Nigerians to the problem of hunger? This shows that there is an injustice in the distribution of the palliative and this compound the level of distrust of the government by the populace. Ghosh and Siddique (2015) and Rose-Ackerman (2016) submitted that good governance, in contrast to democratization, has strong positive effects on measures of social trust, life satisfaction, peace and political legitimacy.

Figure 1. Nigerians looting Covid-19 Aids



Ott (2010, 362) submitted that good governance improves life evaluations either directly, because people are happier living in a context of good government, or indirectly because good governance enables people to achieve higher levels of something else that is directly important to their well-being. Related to Coronavirus pandemic, Van Bavel et al. (2020) also observed that greater trust in government leads to more compliance with health policies – such as measures relating to quarantining, testing and restrictions on mass gatherings. The absence of corruption will increase the trust of the populace in government and this increases efficiency and thus create favourable conditions for the management of the pandemic. There is also evidence that the higher levels of general and specific trust increase the happiness of people even beyond higher incomes (Mungiu-Pippidi 2015). For instance, Helliwell et al.

(2018) found that changes in government services delivery quality contribute positively to citizens' life evaluation.

Elimination of governance politics is essential and crucial in determining the allocation of resources, especially public goods within a country. Good governance exists where there is responsiveness, equity and consistency in the way resources are allocated to the needs especially that of the poor people. It also affects the quality of decision-making generally, for instance, those determining economic and social policy. Without doubt, weakness of governance as well as poor democratic accountability could result in appropriation of resources by specific interest groups as it may have happened in the distribution of the palliative which may exclude the poor, hence, policies would be unlikely to reflect the national interest or pro-poor imperatives.

A democratic government should be more responsive to the needs of the populace such as in providing opportunities in education, health and social welfare, better housing, equitable distribution of development projects including roads and other infrastructural development but democracy in Nigeria is witnessing opposite. Such physical projects taken to local communities and different regions usually provide some employment opportunities and business opportunities which enhance people's quality of life, even though some may be temporary. Good governance is one of the essential preconditions for development and promote healthy live for the populace. Such policy measures tend to generally improve people's capabilities as with better education and health they are often able to experience progression in the social structure better than was possible in the older generation's time.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The effect of COVID-19 pandemic is being felt in spread in almost all countries and it has affected millions of people around the world and it also resulted in the death of millions of people as well. This shows that COVID-19 does not recognize borders hence, governments around the world most especially in developing countries should respond to its management immediately. Although, not all countries, especially the developing countries have the right specialists and experts in pandemics, manufacturers should produce the necessary equipment or laboratories that can help develop a vaccine but good governance must be able to guide and formulate policies to protect its citizenry. Governance in Nigeria has mostly impacted negatively on the Nigerian populace and this is affecting them in the management of the pandemic. This is as a result of the dreaded disease that seems to always inflict its leadership. This disease is called corruption, combined with primitive accumulation of wealth.

This study therefore concludes that governance as well as Political Leaders in Nigeria needs to win trust in order to manage and mitigate the effect of COVID-19 in the country. They should promote the core elements of good governance which are; participatory, consistent with the rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented, equitability and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability to the citizenry. This will therefore, make them to be agile enough to disregard old norms and move quickly to do everything they can to save lives and support infrastructures that help hold the fabric of its society.

On the basis of the findings of the paper, the following policy recommendations are suggested for managing and mitigating coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

- i. That good governance brings about trust and communication is the key to managing coronavirus—it is not enough to just decide on a strategy. Being able to communicate it clearly to the public and to the people without fear of distrust from government to police and the border patrol and finally to the citizenry.

- ii. Governments must be prepared to think outside the box and rescue packages must be put in place through participatory approach. Regulations that are prudent in normal circumstances must be appropriately relaxed to help the national effort.
- iii. Through consensus-orientation, our governments must realize that we live in a globalized world and a crisis like this needs a global response. Cooperation is germane. Past tensions must be set aside and countries must work together to help each other meet short fallings in medicine and equipment.
- iv. Through transparency and responsiveness, stakeholders should be relied on to help with distribution and supporting the populace. Many charities will struggle during this time and need some level of support to help them stay afloat and provide vital support where governments cannot.
- v. Government should always be fair in their dealing with the populace to gain more trust and be able to provide policies that will be generally accepted by the populace.
- vi. Finally, there is also the need for government to communicate the populace through traditional and religious leaders in Nigeria.

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