

Public Trust and State Management of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic generated unprecedented global crises with long-lasting consequences. Among the multifarious aftermath of the pandemic is the question of trust at various levels. In this study, I examined the bi-directional nexus between public trust and the management of the pandemic in Nigeria. The paper established an existing vicious cycle between government management of public policies and the level of public trust. The study was anchored on the application of mixed research methods involving In-depth Interviews (IDI), Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and other authoritative secondary database and sources. The study discovered that the main reason for citizens' resistance to major policies introduced by the government to contain the spread of the pandemic was due to an entrenched lack of trust in the government, its agencies and officials. The findings also indicated that lack of transparency and accountability in the management of the pandemic deepened the already fractured public trust. This was particularly visible in the shrouded pattern of disbursing cash transfers, allegations of corruption against the managers of the pandemic and evidence of hidden palliatives meant to cushion the effects of measures introduced at the peak of the pandemic to contain the spread. Government needs to promote public trust through being responsive and responsible, constant and consistent citizens' engagement, institutionalising transparency and accountability, and engendering a sense of belonging for all citizens. To strengthening critical agencies and bring sanity into the government affairs, there is a need to insulate Election Management Body, Security Agencies, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Anti-Corruption Agencies, Auditor-General of the Federation, and Attorney-General of the Federation from political interferences.

1. Introduction

Public trust is one of the important ingredients upon which the legitimacy and effectiveness of government can be realized and even sustained. Scholars have stated that public trust is crucial for political participation, social cohesion, and galvanizing public support for effective implementation of public policies (Holum, 2022; Kumagai and Iorio, 2020 and Marien and Hooghe, 2011). For instance, there is a positive relationship between public trust and greater compliance with regulations, and effective policy implementation, especially the national tax system (Widaningrum, 2017). Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD (2013) argued that without trust in governments, markets and institutions, support for necessary reforms is difficult to mobilise, particularly where short-term sacrifices are involved and long-term gains might be less tangible. It stressed further that a decline in trust can lead to lower rates of compliance with rules and regulations. Trust is both an input to public sector reforms, necessary for the implementation of

such reforms, and, at the same time, an outcome of reforms, as they influence people's and organisations' attitudes and decisions relevant for economic and social well-being (OECD, 2013) which is an essential ingredient for the effective and efficient policy making both in good and bad times. Investing in trust should be considered as a new and central approach to restoring economic growth and reinforcing social cohesion, as well as a sign that governments are learning the lessons of the crisis. The degree to which institutions are responsive and reliable in delivering policies and services, and act in line with the values of openness, integrity and fairness; cultural, socioeconomic and political drivers, and; government's capacity to address global intergenerational issues were identified as main drivers of trust in government institutions (OECD, 2022).

Most countries have realized that trust in government is a necessary prerequisite for a representative democracy, citizens support and effective policy implementation (Kumagai and Iorio, 2020; Meng et al, 2019; and van der Meer, 2017). Kumagai and Iorio (2020) asserted that the erosion of trust in government is thought to indicate 'the crisis of democracy' with direct and severe consequences for the quality and ability of representative democracy, its institutions and its actors. This explains why advanced countries of the world such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, etc. embraced measures and actions to continue earning citizens' trust. The United States' first goal in National Strategy for COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness (Biden, 2021) underscores the need to 'restore trust with the American people' (p.5). Other studies have demonstrated how governments are trying to enhance citizens' participation in France, Germany, UK and Norway in order to secure much needed trust for public sector governance and policy implementation and performance (Huxley et al, 2015).

However, trust issues between the Nigerian state and the citizens have been a lingering issue that stemmed from a number of factors. These include prolonged mismanagement of public affairs, poor economic performance, increasing rate of unemployment, gagged freedom of speech and media, lack of basic amenities, management of corruption, heightened insecurity, and bad leadership (Saka, 2020). Time series analysis of public perception on transparency and accountability of government management of public policies and resources as published by Edelman Trust Barometer (ETB), International Budget Partnership (IBP), Afrobarometer, and Transparency International (TI) might provide some insight into this. For instance, Nigerian government's institutions had lowest (24 per cent) in the Edelman Trust Barometer's (2021) trust assessment with Nigerians. Similarly, transparency ranking of the International Budget Partnership (IBP), 2008-2021 shows a consistent lower rating of Nigeria compared to other African countries such as Ghana, Kenya and South Africa (See Figure 3). This trend is also observable in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of the Transparency International, 2012-2021 (See Figure 4).

Apart from these results, there are also public perceptions of government and its institution viewed through the lens of challenges associated with the provision of basic needs and deteriorating status of essential institutions and services. This perception is not helped by numerous media reports of mindboggling acts of mismanagement and misappropriation of state resources traceable to leadership and institutions. The examples are just too numerous to mention. The most recent ones are N24 billion Police Pension Scam (Premium Times Feb. 10, 2016), 2009-2011 Oil Subsidy Scam with government paying importers subsidy for 59 million litres per day while the country actually consumed about 35 million litres (Ezeamalu, 12 January, 2017), 2011-2013 Malabu oil deal scandal, September 5th, 2014 15 million dollar arms scandal transported and intercepted in Johannesburg, South Africa linked to a powerful religious figure, 2012 National Assembly's subsidy probe scandal involving \$3million (Channels Television, June 13, 2012), and 2022

N174billion allegation against the suspended Accountant General of the Federation, etc.

But again, much as the Nigerian media landscape has aided the publication of incidence of corruption and graft, there are also the challenges of reporting unsubstantiated, sensational headlines and outright fake news (Wilson and Umar, 2019). Notwithstanding, flourishing incidences of corruption, increasing instance access to public information, and poor state of public infrastructure and essential services have increased public mistrust in the political, military, and bureaucratic leadership and by extension, the state. This seems to have impacted on the efforts and actions of government to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The perception that the pandemic did not exist; that the pandemic was a big man disease; that the government was using the pandemic to siphon public resources; that the pandemic is a product of anti-Christ to depopulate the world; that taking the vaccine is being injected with the “mark of the beast”; that the pandemic is a deliberate strategy of the first world countries to further their influence on the Third World nations; that the pandemic was a weapon of the First world countries only meant to fight themselves, etc. are evidences pointing to the challenges of the management of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. The depth of such public mistrust in the Nigerian state, its officials and institutions is manifested in the manner that Nigerians have reacted to and give ‘support’ to state’s efforts in the management of COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to understand major concerns bothering on citizens’ trust and the management of public policy, the current study raises a pair of questions: first, how has the level of public trust affected the management of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria? Second, and more specifically, how did the management of COVID-19 pandemic shape (increase, sustain or reduce) public trust in Nigeria? In other words, what did government do or failed to do during the COVID-19 pandemic that either increased, sustained or reduced public trust? The answers to these questions are crucial to understanding the extent at which policies, once enacted, could endure, sustain and reshape the perception of citizens on government and institutions. Drawing from insightful discussions from key players in the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Ministry of Finance, Central Bank of Nigeria, civil society groups, random citizens in formal and informal sectors, and others, the study exposed the causes and implications of the decline of trust in Nigerian government, and the remedial actions government can take to restore trust in government and institutions.

The study examined what could have been responsible for Nigerians’ nonchalant attitude: playing 5-a-side football, going to clubs, worshipping in congregation, doing businesses in the markets and elsewhere, evading lockdown measures, not using facemask, resisting taking COVID-19 vaccine, etc. when the world was/is contending with the fear and fatalities of the pandemic. In fact, some in hundreds burnt down police stations over suspension of congregational prayers (The Vanguard Newspaper Report, March 29 2020), and others converged to stone the Sultan of Sokoto and Amir Muslims (Nigeria) for the cancellation of the year-2020 Eid congregation prayer because of COVID-19 pandemic. Aside these incidences, some Nigerians across states of the federation have staged streets protests to denounce the lockdown and other measures of the Federal Government to curtail the spread of the pandemic, while there have been reported incidences of attacks on security agencies and their personnel (Adejumo, 2020). Meanwhile, records have shown that adopted measures that were even more constraining in other countries as South Africa, Kenya, United States, United Kingdom, France, Vietnam, Asia Countries, etc. were strictly complied with by the public (Chua et al, 2021; Padidar et al, 2021; Rooij, 2021 and Thanh Vu, 2021). A cross-sectional study in 12 Asian countries (Chua et al, 2021) and that of the Southern African Kingdom of

Eswatini (Padidar et al, 2021) showed self-motivated high compliance behaviour among the citizens. For much deeper understanding, the study scrutinized the current nature and drivers of public mistrust in Nigeria using major indicators as highlighted by OECD (2022), understanding the Nigeria's global position in transparency and accountability, interrogating the extent to which the issue of trust affects the management of the COVID-19 pandemic and importantly, explaining those actions or inactions of government during the COVID-19 pandemic that either increased, sustained or reduced public trust in Nigeria.

2. Public Trust and the Challenges of Policy Implementation in Nigeria

In the works of Thanh Vu (2021), Kumagai and Iorio (2020), Beshi and Kaur (2019), Uslaner (2002) and Blind (2007), trust is seen a multidimensional concept that hinged on human contacts, interaction, and relationship with consequences of cooperation, expectations, reliability, sincerity, and goodwill. Scholars from varying degree of discipline have approached the concept differently with convergent arguments of mutual respect, expectations, commitment and reliability (Stern and Coleman, 2015; Smith et al, 2013; Thanh Vu, 2021). Kumagai and Iorio (2020) put trust as the underpinning of all human contacts and institutional interactions and can be defined as the willingness of one party to rely on the other party to keep its commitments. Building such trust takes some time with numerous number of credible performance and commitment from both parties involved. However, it could also be diminished because of the slightest error that may result into chaos.

Meanwhile, building trust is an essential ingredient to effective governance, policy making and implementation especially in a complicated and heterogeneous democracy. Though, Kumagai and Iorio (2020) and OECD (2013) argued that maintaining the confidence of stakeholders and public trust is suggested to be a complex and complicated task for the government and its institutions for a quality representative democracy. However, the presence of it could enhance the performance of the government and its policies. While Thanh Vu (2021) interrogates how much the Vietnamese public trust their government during the COVID-19 pandemic and how public trust in government translates into support and compliance with government's policy and regulation, he found out that there is a significant positive correlation between public trust in government and policy compliance. This indicated that Vietnamese trust in their government translated into much needed supports and compliance during the pandemic. In a related argument, Kumagai and Iorio (2020) called it a necessary precondition for representative democracy. He advanced further that the erosion of trust in government is thought to indicate 'crisis of democracy' with direct consequences for the quality and ability of representative democracy, its institutions and actors.

OECD (2013) also contributed to the discourse of trust while explaining that a decline in trust can lead to lower rates of compliance with rules and regulations. Citizens and businesses can also become more risk-averse, delaying investment, innovation and employment decisions that are essential to regain competitiveness and jumpstart growth. Nurturing trust represents an investment in economic recovery and social well-being for the future. OECD identified the challenge of maintaining trust has been complicated by a faster and more diversified flow of information across society, such as through civil society, the internet and social networks. It concluded that understanding what drives trust in government is essential to build a virtuous cycle that is able to sustain economic growth and well-being in short, medium and long term.

On account of trust in Nigeria, there has been an account of resistance to government policy. The

public revolts by Egba Women against taxation, the Aba Women's riot also against taxation, the Ifa Valley Miners revolt, the Agbekoya Parapo revolt in Western Nigeria and Isaac Boro revolt in the Niger Delta easily come to the fore (Adeniran, 1974; Van Allen, 1975; Johnson, 1982; Falola and Paddock, 2011). In the era of military rule and clamp down on peaceful public expressions and dissent, Nigerians still continued the culture of engaging the State. Public engagement against the State according to Momoh (1996) takes many forms the most significant of which are; students' struggles, peasants' agitation and revolt, and workers and trade unions struggles. Through these platforms, amongst others, Nigerians critically engaged with the State and those conducting State affairs. The restriction of space for public engagement and criticism of government actions, policies and programmes under military dictatorship aided public withdrawal and the consequential loss of trust in the State and its functionaries by Nigerians.

Similarly, since the return to civil rule in 1999, Nigerians have continued on the path of critical engagement with the state inclusive of expression of dissent through peaceful protests. The fuel subsidy removal protest of 2011 being the most notable instance of public expression of outrage against government policy. 2020 #EndSARS protest also expresses anger of the citizens against Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) actions which temporarily held the country. While the protests over fuel subsidy removal and the Police amongst such other citizen's expression of dissent against the Nigerian State were avenue for civic engagement with the state in the context of the space for public engagement that democracy affords, it also represented a breakdown of effective civic communication between the State and citizens. It is within this context of poor state communication with citizens and breakdown of trust all of which are manifestations of poor State-Civil Society's relations that one can understand Nigerians perception of the State and the struggle to trust and support the Nigerian state in the context of fighting COVID-19 pandemic since the virus made its landing in Nigeria.

3. Research Design

The proposition of this paper is that there is a vicious cycle between government management of public policies and emergencies and the level of public trust. In other words, as a result of limited transparency and accountability in the management of government affairs, the public appears to have very limited trust in government. In order to explore this proposition, this study is using COVID-19 and all the issues related to it as the case study.

This research is anchored on the application of mixed methods. Data for the study were sourced from multiple sources that are quantitative, qualitative, other content, and historical. The research collected data through In-depth Interview (in-person and/or through telephone), existing literature, and authoritative secondary data and online sources. It also made use of social media data mining (Facebook, Instagram, and twitter) especially various protest videos and major television discussions and analyses. The triangulation of these sources explained various contours and variations in the perceptions of the public and stakeholders on the issue of trust and the management of COVID-19.

The quantitative data of this study were obtained from the existing data repository and globally recognized data centres. For the questions on the state of public trust, transparency and accountability, International Budget Partnership (IBP), Afrobarometer, and Transparency International (TI) provided data to establish those variables. The qualitative data were obtained from interviews from important government officials, Committees and MDAs such as the Presidential Steering Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic, Ministries of Humanitarian Affairs and

Finance, Central Bank of Nigeria and related CSOs while FGD were from formal and informal sectors including those citizens who participated in the spontaneous actions on the mismanagement of the palliatives.

For the government side, the study used purposive sampling. Meanwhile, to understand the trigger of the citizens' responses (actions and inactions), purposive and snowball sampling were adopted. The sample size was determined by the extent of access and linkages to various respondents through purposive and snowball. However, because of the ongoing pandemic, necessary protective measures were adopted during this study.

4. Results and Discussion of Findings

The public mistrust in Nigeria especially on the intention of the government in formulating and implementing policies had been informed by the degree of deficiency in what the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD (2022) tagged drivers of trust in government institutions. Overtime, Nigerian public had witnessed deteriorating provision of public goods, questionable leadership, partisan electoral body with no integrity, high level of corruption, heightened insecurity, lack of value for human life and concern, etc. Despite the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act (2011) and constitutional responsibility of the legislature, many records indicate lack of openness, integrity, fairness, transparency, and accountability in the activities of government which continuously triggering mistrust of the public in the affairs of the state. This has affected number of good policies such as fuel subsidy, increase taxes and recently issues surrounding the management of COVID-19 pandemic. There are several misconceptions attached to the existence of COVID-19 which could be seen in the citizens' adherence to many precautions as issued by the government and its agencies. Up till now, millions of Nigerian are unwilling to be vaccinated, not using facemask, not bothered about distancing (at social gatherings including official places).

4.1. The nature and major drivers of public mistrust in Nigeria

The level of current distrust in government institutions and officials are caused by the long years of non-performance of state in the provision of public goods. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-OECD (2022) highlighted major drivers of trust in government institutions as the degree to which institutions are responsive and reliable in delivering policies and services, and act in line with the values of openness, integrity and fairness; as well government's capacity to address essential services as education, health, security, job creation, etc.

Nigerian state has been battling, failing, and drowning. Its issue had culminated into extreme poverty and hunger, massive unemployment, drowning naira status, inflation of goods and commodities, agitations for self-control and separatism, extremism and insecurity, and unfortunately, corruption. Citizens have lost the interest in the activities of the government, while the trust in the state and public institutions is diminishing. Essential services such as education, health, security, electricity, water supply, road, etcetera are either unavailable or weakly available. Most citizens are not enjoying their bargained pact as advanced in the Theory of State. Specifically, the major drivers of mistrust as highlighted by OECD was used one after the other to explain what has affected public trust in Nigeria, overtime.

Education

For instance, Nigeria educational system is suffering from deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate welfare and incentives for the teachers and lecturers, ill-prepared personnel, and incessant strike actions at all levels (See Table 1 for months of strike action in the Nigerian universities).

Table 1: Academic Staff Union of the Universities (ASUU) Strike Chart, 1999 to date

S/N	Year of Strike Action	Period of Strike Action
1.	1999	5 months
2.	2001	3 months
3.	2002	2 weeks
4.	2003	6 months
5.	2005	2 weeks
6.	2006	6 days
7.	2007	3 months
8.	2008	1 week
9.	2009	4 months
10.	2010	5 months
11.	2011	59 days
12.	2013	5 months
13.	2017	1 month
14.	2018	3 months
15.	2020	9 months
16.	2022	5 months and counting

Source: Author's compilation from Nigerian newspapers, 1999 - 2022

Table 1 shows the annual frequency of strike incidence in Nigeria universities. From 1999 to June 2022, ASUU, an umbrella body of the teaching staff of federal and state government-owned universities in Nigeria had used a total of more than 1,420 days to go on strike. Meaning, close to four years had gone to boycott of classrooms by the lecturers, and blackout to the knowledge base of the country and young generation. The striking lecturers' demands include funding for the revitalization of public universities, earned academic allowances, promotion arrears and recently university transparency accountability solution (UTAS)-payment system. However, the data presented have not included other university unions and other tertiary institutions strike actions. This among others had contributed to the non-competitive and weak status of Nigerian education among the comity of nations. As at January 2022, Nigeria's best University-University of Ibadan - is 1,172nd in the world with impact ranks-2251 and excellence rank- 1373 (Centre for World University Ranking Report, 2022). Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) identified infrastructure lapses, over-politisation, mediocrity, and frequent strike as some of the reasons for the poor global ranking of Nigeria varsities (Punch Newspaper, November 23rd, 2021).

As the population keep increasing, access, quality and output are seriously affected. The current education facilities in the Nigeria universities could not accommodate qualified millions of school leavers. The supervising entrance institution, Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), had recorded limited space as millions of applicants are emerging every year. Data available revealed that between 2010 and 2015, 26% of the 10 million applicants gained entry into Nigerian tertiary institutions (JAMB, 2016). Nearly the same result was recorded in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Thus, nearly 75% of college applicants in Nigeria fail to get in every year. However, while the less privilege dropped out of the classrooms, upper hand privilege few have been seeking higher education in the private tertiary institutions and the foreign countries including Australia, United States, China, Canada, Ireland, United Kingdom, Ukraine, Russia, Ghana, etc. Nigeria has become one of the most sought-after markets for student recruiters in major destination countries.

Health

A study put budgetary allocation to health sector in Nigeria increased from N59 billion in 2004 to N283 billion in 2013 representing 500 per cent increase within a decade (Hamalai, Aremu and Umar, 2015). Also, between 2014 and 2021, there was an increase as 339.38bn (2014), 347.26bn (2015), 353.54bn (2016), 380.16bn (2017), 528.14bn (2018), 372.70bn (2019), 463.80bn (2020), and 549.83bn (2021) (Adebisi, Umah, Olaoye, Alaran, Sina-Odunsi and Lucero-Prisno III, 2020; and Amata, 2021). Paradoxically, the period witnessed the highest incidence of strikes by health workers in the history of Nigeria. Of the total 187 months spent between May 29 1999 and December 31 2014, 80 months (representing 43 per cent) recorded one form of strike or another ranging from warning strikes of a few days to indefinite strikes which lasted months. And also, between 2013 and 2021, another report from the International Centre for Investigative Reporting-ICIR stated that Federal Government-run hospitals in Nigeria loss about 300 working days between 2013 and 2021 (ICIR, December 17, 2021). Typically, strikes rupture operations of health facilities, prevent access to healthcare which is a constitutional right of citizens and worsens Nigeria's health status in global ranking. Nigeria's ranking in various indicators of health has not recorded significant improvement. Nigeria improved with a lower rate in the World Health Organisation's (WHO) health system ranking from 187 out of 191 countries in 2001 (two decades ago) to 163 out of 191 countries in 2021 (WHO's Health System Ranking, 2021).

Currently, the health sector in Nigeria is suffering from serious infrastructure deficit with lower of health personnel compared to the population. At present, Nigeria has a doctor-to-population ratio of about 1:4000-5000 which falls far short of the WHO recommended doctor-to-population ratio of 1:600 (Guardian Newspaper, April 24, 2022). Unfortunately, higher number of Nigerian health workers are scattered all over the foreign countries while hundreds of others are busy applying for visa abroad.

The health sector is characterized by lack of effective stewardship role of government, fragmented health service delivery, inadequate and inefficient financing, weak health infrastructure, mal-distribution of health work force and poor coordination amongst key players (Hamalai, Aremu and Umar, 2015). However, Nigerians especially the poor are suffering from weak health institution. And this had resulted into an unending flock to foreign countries by wealthy Nigerians in search of medical care, while the poor are left with no option other than to probably die of avoidable illness and diseases.

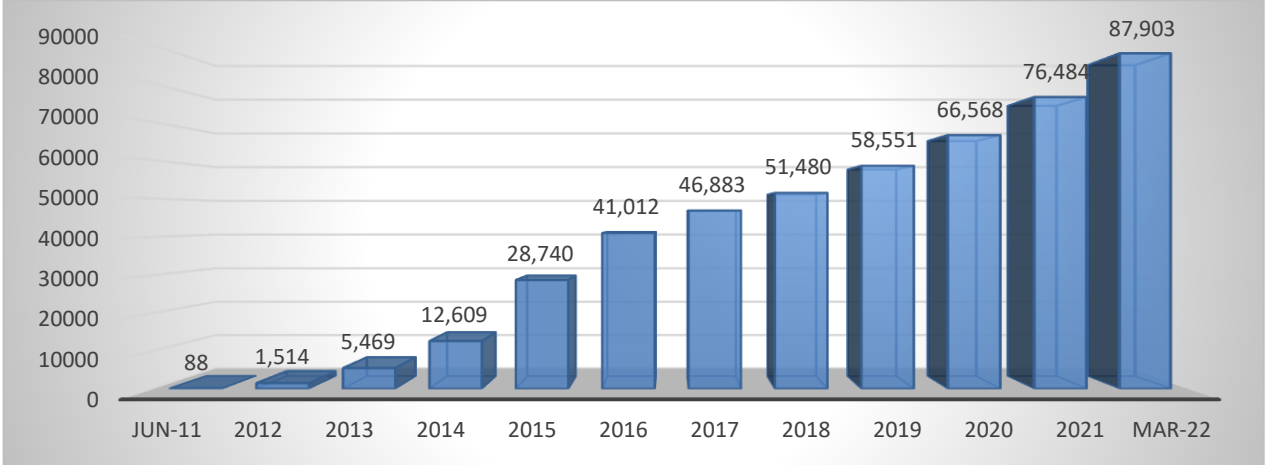
Security

The state failed in its pact to its citizens, thousands of lives and properties have been lost to insecurity, citizens took up arms against the state and its citizens, the citizens and the state governments are helpless and have lost hope in the capacity of the Nigerian state, and security agencies to protect lives and properties. From extremism in the North to separatist insurgency in South-East, banditry and kidnapping in the North-West and North-Central, herders-farmers

clashes in South-West and North-Central, oil militancy in the South-South, and other violent attacks, human lives are lost or permanently damaged (Tanko, 19 July 2021) and faith in state and its institutions is diminishing. Confronted with seemingly helpless situation, State Governors and political leaders in Nigeria federation have resorted to self-help, setting up regional security outfits (ThisDays Newspaper, June 28, 2021) and directing residents of the state to acquire guns to defend themselves against the predators (Maishanu, June 26 2022).

Currently, heightened insecurity is a common knowledge in Nigeria. Unfortunately, security architecture at all levels is weak and could not combat the criminal tendencies of the society. Various groups and individuals are easily terrorizing the lives of the citizens without consequence. That gives more groups of kidnapers, and etc. to erupt. Overtime, Nigerians have witnessed a devastating effect of insecurity. There are incidences ranges from kidnapping for ransom, to ritual killings, assassination, attacks on schools, detaining and torturing students and teachers, armed robbery, banditry and insurgency. According to Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) of the Council on Foreign Relations as at March 2022, Nigeria have recorded 87,903 deaths to all forms of violent attacks. Figure 1 indicates clearly year-by-year deaths from the violent attacks since June 2011 to March, 2022.

Figure 1: Number of Deaths (Cumulative) in Nigeria from Violent Attacks, June 2011 to March, 2022



Source: Nigeria Security Tracker, April 4, 2022. Available on <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.

In this, citizens of varying categories including students and girls have been victims. Table 2 explained the top ten states with highest number of kidnap attempts, fatalities during kidnap attempts, number of kidnap incidents and regions/zones.

Table 2: Cases of kidnap incidents, fatalities, and kidnap attempts in Nigeria

State	Fatalities during kidnap attempts	Number of kidnap incidents	Zones
Borno	489	82	NE
Kaduna	209	117	NW
Katsina	147	52	NW
Rivers	131	120	SS
Adamawa	91	35	NE

Niger	62	32	NC
Delta	58	96	SS
Zamfara	58	29	NW
Taraba	56	47	NE
Edo	30	34	SS

Source: SBM Intelligence Report, 2021

In all these cases unfortunately, schools at all levels have also become a target. Recent happenings indicated a shift to schools at all levels and students and as victims of the kidnapping. Hundreds of students and teachers/lecturers have been kidnapped and killed in the violent incidences and attacks described above. Table 3 shows the timeline of the attacks on schools and abduction of students and teachers/lecturers since 2014.

Table 3: Timeline of attacks, killings and abductions in schools in Nigeria, 2013 to 2022

Date	School	Number of abductees, killed	State	Region
July 6, 2013	Government Secondary School, Mamudo	42 (killed)	Yobe	NE
29 September, 2013	Yobe State College of Agriculture	40 (killed)	Yobe	NE
25 February, 2014	Federal Government College, Buni Yadi	43 (killed)	Yobe	NE
25 February, 2014	Government Secondary School, Damaturu	29 (killed)	Yobe	NE
April 14, 2014	Government Girls Secondary School, Chibok	276	Borno	NE
February 19, 2018	Government Girls Science Technical College (GGSTC), Dapchi	110	Yobe	NW
December 11, 2020	Government Science Secondary School, Kankara	303	Katsina	NW
December 19, 2020	Islamic School Students, Dandume	80	Katsina	NW
February 17, 2021	Government Science College Kagara, Shiroro.	41	Niger State	NC
February 26, 2021	Government Girls Science Secondary School, Jangebe	317	Zamfara	NW
March 11, 2021	Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Afaka	39	Kaduna	NW
March 11, 2021	Federal College of Forestry Mechanisation, Mando	39	Kaduna	NW
March 14, 2021	UBE Primary School, Rama	39	Kaduna	NW
April 20, 2021	Greenfield University, Chikum	20	Kaduna	NW
May 30, 2021	Islamic School, Niger	100	Niger	NC
June 17, 2021	Federal Government College,	NIL	Kebbi	NW

	Birnin Yauri			
April 12, 2022	Zamfara State College of Health Technology, Tsafe	NIL	Zamfara	NW

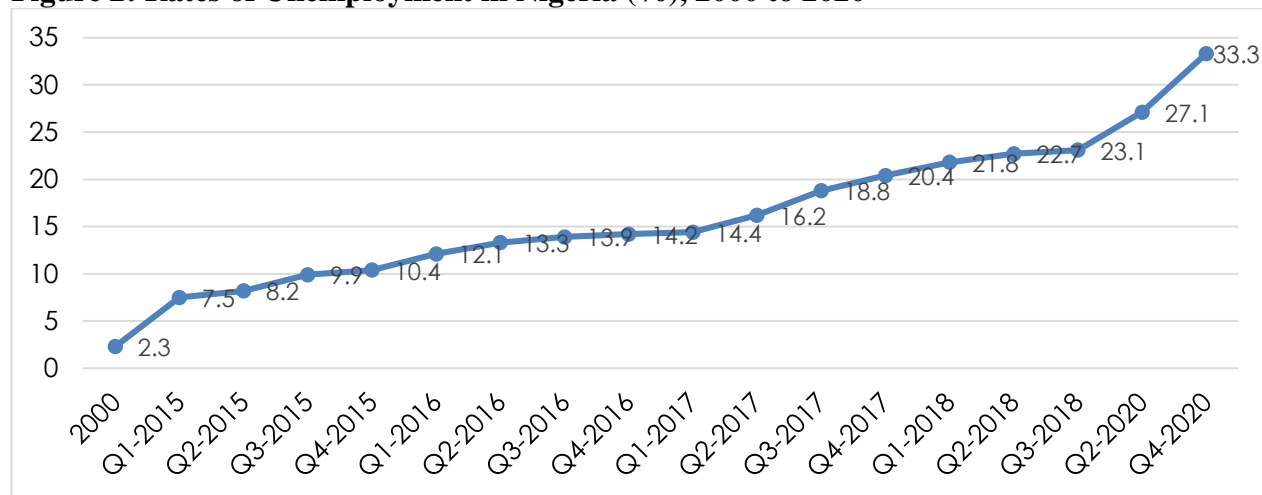
Source: Authors compilation from national dailies

Unfortunately, efforts of the government and its related agencies are not significant. Nigerians and visitors are leaving in fears.

Unemployment Rates and Issues

Unfortunately, the situations as described above is compounded by the increasing unemployment situation in the country. Government have neither been able to provide jobs nor conducive environment for the investors who could provide alternatives to public space. Since 1999, unemployment rates has kept increasing (See Figure 2), while the tertiary institutions kept producing millions every year to the economy. Thus, leaving millions of new entrants to shrouded fate.

Figure 2: Rates of Unemployment in Nigeria (%), 2000 to 2020



Source: National Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Report (2000 - 2020)

Millions of unemployed with varying degree of academic and professional expertise are littered around the streets doing nothing. Some scholars have argued that the challenges had brought some social, psychological and economic consequences such as increase in crime rate, loss of respect and identity, reduction in purchasing power, psychological injuries, and corruption among others (Omitogun and Longe, 2017).

Corruption Issues

Another trigger of mistrust between the public and the state is the increasing magnitude of corruption, especially by the high profile officials and the institutions of government. The rate of corruption in Nigeria persists at alarming rate to the extent that Nigeria was in 1997 ranked 52 as the least corrupt nations out of 175 countries, only to jump to 152 in 2005. By 2019 ranking, Nigeria is now the second most corrupt ECOWAS country (Transparency International, 2018 and 2019). In 2020, corruption in Nigeria increased to 149 (Transparency International, 2020) out of 180 countries surveyed (See Figures 3, 4 and 5). Meanwhile, there are other evidences likened the

management of the Nigerian state with corruption, lack of transparency, accountability and fiscal indiscipline (Adeyemo, Akindele, Aluko and Agesin, 2012; United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 2016 and Uzor, 2017).

Mutiullah et al (2016) stated that the primordial instinct of the ruling elite is to loot the national treasury, perpetuate themselves in power and brutally suppress all dissent and opposition. Worse, the booty is not invested in Africa, but in foreign banks and countries. As a matter of fact, a former Head of State has been humorously described as one of the ancestors of Nigeria who has been donating money generously to successive governments from the land of the dead as his loot was outrageous. Abacha loots of estimated \$5 billion and recovered, according to Vanguard (8 March, 2020), by various governments as follows:

- a) Under General Abdulsalami Abubakar: \$750 million;
- b) Under President Olusegun Obasanjo: \$2 billion;
- c) Under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua: \$0,
- d) Under President Goodluck Jonathan: \$227 million; and
- e) Under President Muhammadu Buhari: \$630 million);

Beyond Abacha loots, the most recent account of prominent and politically motivated corrupt practices with its proceeds as deduced from the newspapers (Content Analysis, 2022) are as follows:

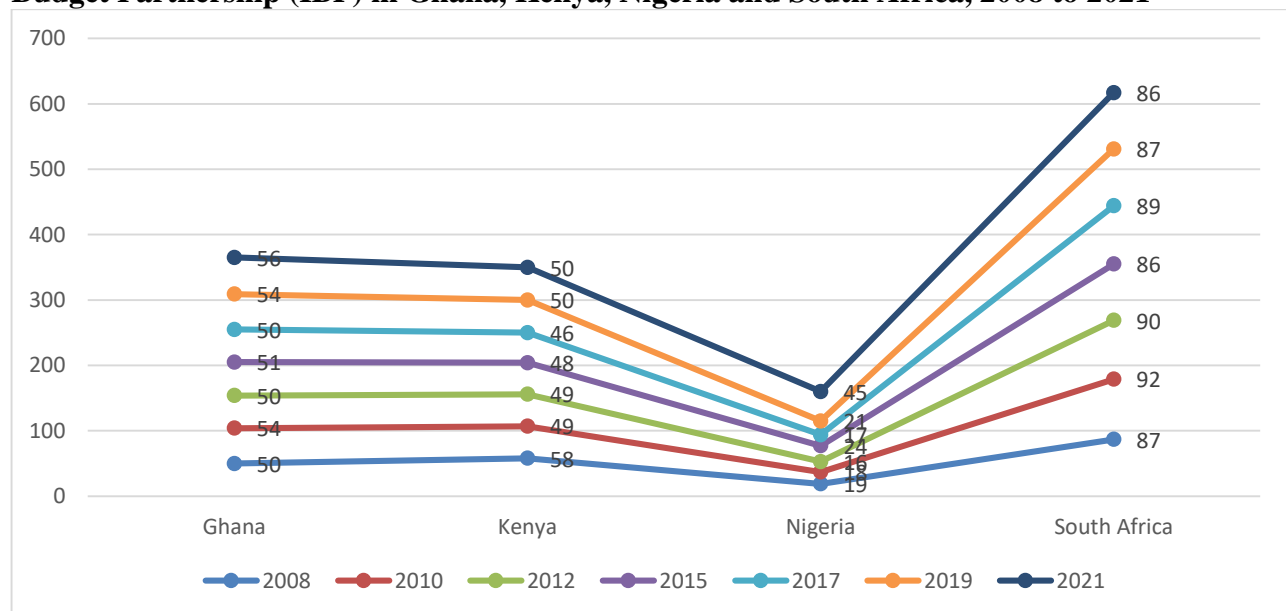
- i. N24billion Police Pension Scam (Premium Times Feb. 10, 2016),
- ii. Ekiti electoral gate in 2016;
- iii. Oil Subsidy Scam;
- iv. Malabo oil deal involving former Attorney General of the Federation (AGF);
- v. 15 million dollar arms scandal transported and intercepted in Johannesburg;
- vi. Missing of 20bn oil money alleged by the former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN);
- vii. March 13th 2015 Abba Moro's Nigeria Immigration Service job recruitment scandal;
- viii. National Assembly's subsidy probe scandal involving \$3million; and recently
- ix. N174billion and trillion naira allegations against the suspended Accountant General of the Federation and NIMASA boss, etc.

Citizen had understood that non-performance meager budgetary allocation to various sectors as highlighted above is been hindered by mismanagement and corrupt practices. Corruption is endemic and have caused so much harm to the effectiveness of the institutions and service delivery.

4.2. Nigeria's global position in transparency and accountability

The discourse of transparency and accountability is germane to understand how the international ranking agencies rated Nigeria, and why it was rated that way. This is because the indices and methodology of rating will be viewed from comparative perspectives as other similar countries would be placed side-by-side. Thus, to marry the nature and triggers of Nigeria's public trust has been examined above, the paper investigate the trend of reports and outcome of some agencies such as International Budget Partnership (IBP), Afrobarometer, and Transparency International (TI).

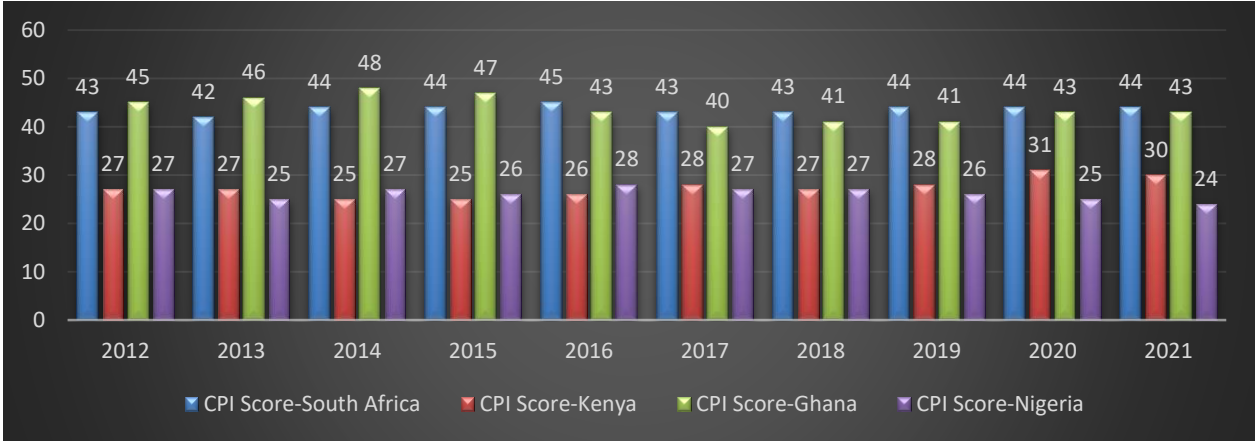
Figure 3: Transparency ranking of the Open Budget Survey (OBS) of the International Budget Partnership (IBP) in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, 2008 to 2021



Source: Dataset of the International Budget Partnership (2022), accessed on <https://survey.internationalbudget.org/#download>

Fig. 3 shows the trend in the cross-country open survey of the International Budget Partnership (IBP) from 2008 to 2021. The dataset indicated a large deficit between the comparing states and Nigeria. The largest year better result in Nigeria was 2021 where it scored 45 against 56, 50, and 86 in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa respectively. The same experience was witnessed in the Transparency International's (TI) corruption perception index (CPI) (see Figure 4).

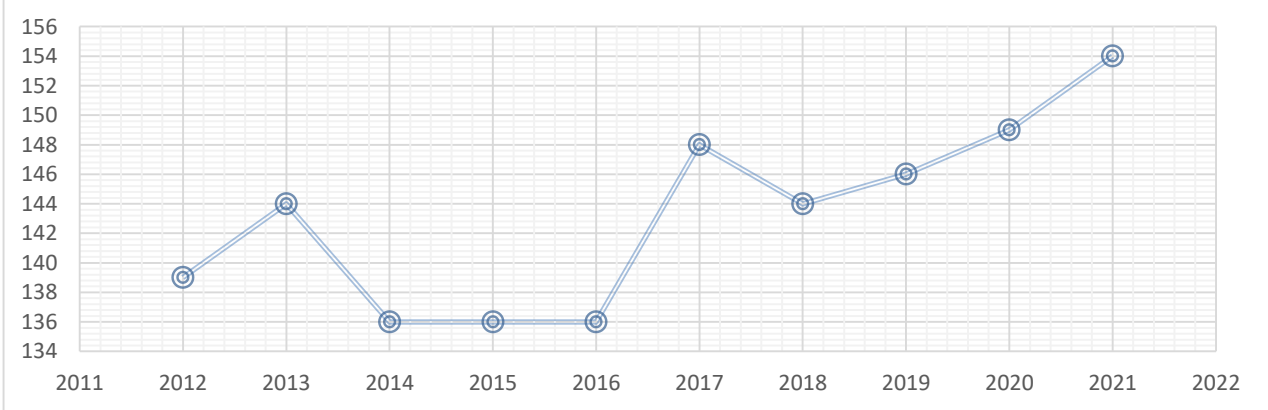
Figure 4: Corruption Perception Index in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, 2012 to 2021



Source: Transparency International (Website: <https://www.transparency.org/>), 2022

With comparison with other African countries, Fig. 4 indicates devastating level of public sector corruption in Nigeria. Accordingly, it covers bribery, diversion of public funds, official using their public office for private gain without facing consequences, ability of the government to contain corruption, excessive red tape in the public sector, nepotistic appointments in the civil service, extent of implementing laws ensuring that public officials discloses their finances and potential conflicts of interest, legal protection for people who report cases of bribery and corruption, state capture by narrow vested interests, and access to information on public affairs/government activities. Specifically, Nigeria is the 154 least corrupt nation out of 180 countries, according to the 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index reported by Transparency International (Corruption Perception Index Report, 2021). However, Nigeria position overtime is staggering until 2016 when it sharply increased and never come down (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Nigeria Position in the Global Ranking of Corrupt Countries, 2012 to 2021



Source: Transparency International (Website: <https://www.transparency.org/>), 2022

Unfortunately, fighting corruption is the major cardinal of the current state administration. President Muhammadu Buhari identified security, economy and corruption as the key major

priorities (Vanguard Newspaper, June 17, 2022) and has been consistently increasing budget allocation to key anti-corruption agencies (Sanni, 11 November, 2021). Because of this and other indicators explained above have wane down the level of trust and support for the Buhari administration. As President Buhari taking over the government on May 29, 2015, expectations are high as most Nigerians expect the coming government to wave a magic wand and make all the existing major problems such as insecurity, high unemployment, institutionalize corruption, poor economy management, fuel scarcity and subsidy, high foreign earning and exchange, etc. disappear. Unfortunately, those issues are more badly shaped now compared to 2015 when the current government took over.

4.3. Public trust and management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria

As the world began to suffer the shock of COVID-19 pandemic with greater consequences, most Nigerians either did not accept that the virus exists or did not believe that it was a serious life threatening pandemic. Apart from these two misconceptions, there are other perceptions as ‘the pandemic is a big man disease’, ‘the government is using the pandemic to siphon public resources’, ‘the pandemic is a product of anti-Christ to depopulate the world’, ‘the pandemic is a deliberate strategy of the first world countries to further their influence on third world nations’, ‘the pandemic is a weapon of the first world countries only meant to fight themselves’, etc. Despite mass orientation, precautions and protocols, most Nigerians do not care about the danger of the pandemic. Evidence point at the challenges orchestrated by the level of public trust in government officials and institutions as explained above. Between the 27th February 2020 when country reported its first COVID-19 case (Federal Ministry of Health, 2020) and now, Nigeria had suffered the outbreak and three distinct waves of infection (June 2020, January 2021 and August 2021) that have resulted into thousands of deaths, economy loss, and citizens’ primary source of income, depression, and rise in domestic violence.

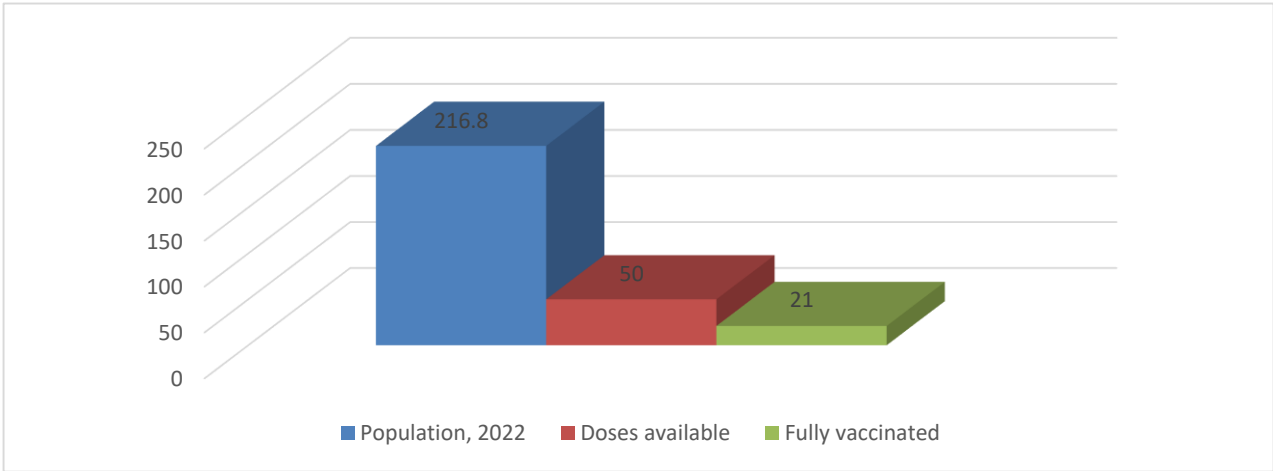
In a conversation with some of the members of the multi-sectoral COVID-19 Preparedness Group, it was discovered that poverty, poor health facilities, inadequate testing centre, shortage of health workers, low level of informed populace were the major challenges that confronted and still confronting the management of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Beyond these, the study found that distrust in government and its activities was/is a major problem in COVID-19 management. The strong indication to this is that the NCDC protocols such as social distancing, wearing of facemasks, constant cleaning of hands with soap and sanitizers, no public gathering, etc. were said to have received a low level of compliance (Survey Report, 2022). PTF stated that close monitoring of activities shows that the level of compliance was unsatisfactory (Survey Report, 2022). In fact, as at the peak of the pandemic that necessitated total lockdown measure, many Nigerians were nonchalantly moving on with daily business. While a senior member of the PTF stated that “it is terrifying to understand the danger and gravity of threat while the subjects are seeing it as a deceit”, a group during a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) concluded that ‘do you actually belief in that thing called COVID? Don’t disturb yourself at all. Our government officials are thieves; they only want to use it to siphon public pulse’. Meanwhile, media sources earlier reported that Nigerians were consistently playing 5-aside football matches, going to club houses (The Guardian Newspaper, April 1, 2021), worshipping in congregation (The Guardian Newspaper, December 25 2021), doing businesses in the markets and elsewhere. In fact, some in hundreds burnt down police stations over suspension of congregational prayers (The Vanguard Newspaper Report, March 29 2020; and The Punch Newspaper, May 2 2022) and others converged to stone the Sultan of Sokoto and Amir Muslims (Nigeria) for the cancellation of the

year-2020 Eid congregation prayer because of the COVID.

Most of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the attitude of most Nigerians to the government responses, saying those responses were in the best interest of the populace. Government cannot fold its hands while allowing its citizens to die of avoidable diseases like the pandemic. Pandemic is real, and have taking 6,329,275 lives (as at June 29, 2022) with cumulative 542,188,789 cases (as at June 29, 2022) throughout the world (WHO Coronavirus Dashboard, 29th June, 2022). In it, Nigeria had confirmed cases of 256,958 and 3,144 deaths (WHO Coronavirus Dashboard, 29th June, 2022). Despite this serious posture and data, up till now, many Nigerians including the educated ones are still running away from vaccination.

Vaccine hesitancy and non-compliance is disturbing, especially among the government staff and other formal and informal sectors. The serial mass orientation and public awareness launched by the government and its agencies at various levels is yielding slowly. On 2nd March, 2021, Nigeria took delivery of 3.9million doses of the much anticipated Oxford Astrazeneca vaccine. Similarly, it also received 177, 600 Janssen Johnson John vaccine on 12th August, 2021. Other doses in millions continue to flow in the country. Thus, World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that Nigeria had received a total of 50.6million doses of vaccines (WHO Coronavirus Dashboard, 2022). Unfortunately, only 21million of the population had been fully vaccinated (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Nigeria Population, Available Vaccine and Fully Vaccinated as at June 30, 2022



Source: Worldometer, 30 June 2022; and WHO Coronavirus Dashboard, 30 June, 2022.

With the public trust pandemic caused by government irresponsibility and non-performance amplified by the level of corruption and mismanagement of public resources, the already established controversies surrounding the pandemic itself was complicated by the hesitancy of the citizens to take COVID-19 vaccine. There were numerous identified self-created myths spreading quickly on the social media which was validated during the survey of this study to have been scaring the citizens from the vaccine Centres. The following are the major responses to why the respondents are not taking vaccine in Nigeria:

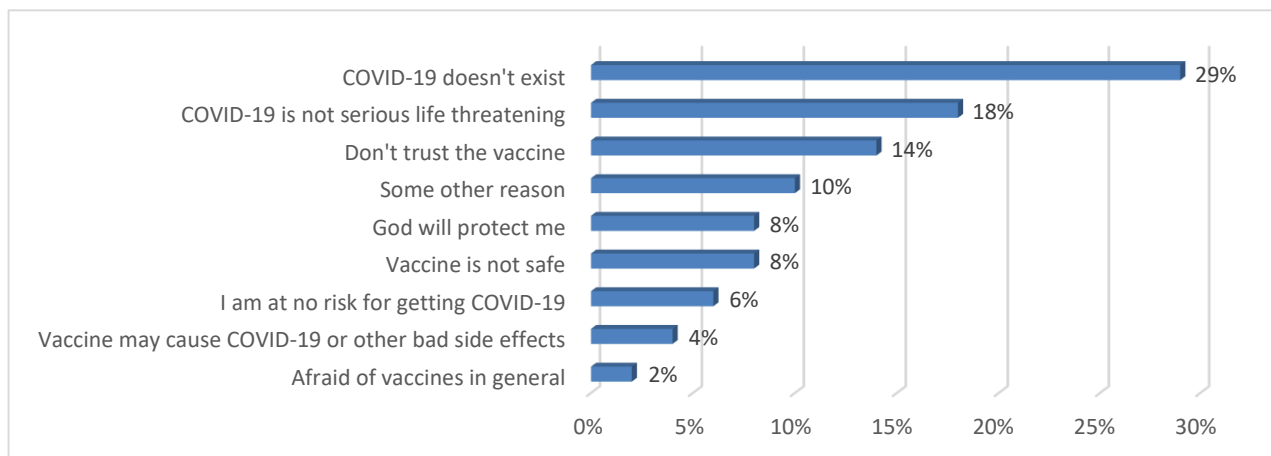
- a) There is no COVID-19 in Nigeria,;
- b) Vaccine is a bad chemicals that’s meant to reduce potency and child bearing;

- c) COVID is a malaria packaged for us as pandemic; local herbs is enough to management it;
- d) COVID-19 vaccine makes recipient’s body magnetic;
- e) Vaccine is only necessary if I want to travel out of the country;
- f) Even if government is paying fpeople for taking vaccine, I will not take it;
- g) We are not sure if the vaccine is properly managed and safe;
- h) I don’t want Nigeria to use me for an experiment.

In response to citizens’ hesitancy, government threatened and have applied a stringent rule to enforce compliance. Some of which include the Federal and some state’s governments ‘no vaccination, no entry into work places’ policy (Channels Television, 15 September, 2021; Premium Times, 21 October, 2021 and Nigerian Tribune, 2 December, 2021). Unfortunately, Federal High Court in Port Harcourt, Rivers State with suit marked FHC/PH/FHR/266/2021 granted an order restraining Edo Governor and the state government from restricting unvaccinated persons from attending mass gathering as from September, 2021 (Muanya et al, 01 September, 2021). This court order ended the sanction (s) proposed by the government to enforce vaccination. Thus, the hesitancy grow wider alongside the myths. There are still hundreds of thousands of workers formal and millions of informal industry that have neither taking nor refusing vaccine (Afrobarometer’s News Release, 7 June, 2022). As a result, millions of vaccine had expired and destroyed (Adebowale, 22 December, 2021).

Relatedly, one of the leading empirical platforms in Africa, Afrobarometer in its recent publication (7 June, 2022) stated that “one-third of Nigerian adults say they are unlikely to try to get vaccinated against COVID-19, including many who say they don’t believe the virus exists or is a serious threat”. See the hierarchy of the main reasons for vaccine hesitancy as published by Afrobarometer (2022) in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Main reason for vaccine hesitancy in Nigeria, June 30, 2022



Source: Afrobarometer’s News Release, 7 June, 2022.

Apparently awed by the endless consequences of public distrust of the government and the

officials, the great efforts and resources devoted during the management of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria could have been pronounced and effective.

4.4. The management of COVID-19 pandemic and the public trust in Nigeria

To begin with, what did government do or failed to do during the COVID-19 pandemic that either increased, sustained or reduced public trust? Government responses to the world shocking pandemic since 2020 falls into four main domains:

- a) Containment;
- b) Public Health Measures,
- c) Social and Economic Policies, and
- d) Fund Raising.

Government was highly commended for its response to COVID-19 pandemic, importantly setting up the clinics and testing centres, testing, tracing contacts, treatments and the investment on the various means adopted for public awareness. There were other series of stringent non-pharmaceutical interventions, such as lockdown that include stay-at-home orders, cessation of non-essential movements and activities, closure of schools and workplaces, bans on religious and social gatherings, cancellation of public events, curfews, restrictions on movement, and cessation of interstate and international travel. The lockdown strategy was a drastic and temporary measure implemented with two objectives:

- To slow the spread of the virus across the country, and
- To buy time for the health system to increase its preparedness.

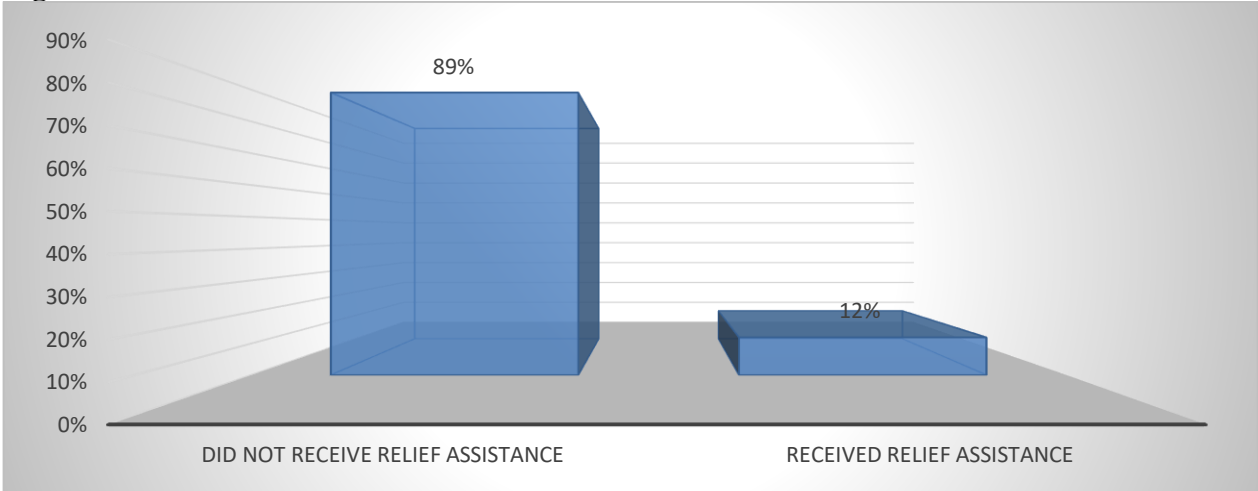
To a large extent, the strategy yielded some positive result as Nigeria as at August 15, 2021 ranked 4th among the top ten most successful responses to COVID-19 in the world by the Economist's Global Normalcy Index (2021) out of 50 countries which is commendable. However, major activities surrounding the shrouded nature of the activities, especially the lack transparency and accountability of the funding and social stimulus interventions (such as the palliatives and the cash transfer) have worsened the deteriorating level of distrust on the government. Many were convinced in either 'no such thing as COVID' or it is not serious life threatening' (Survey Report, 2022). Despite the fact that there were verifiable centres, victim's account, daily casualties recorded, several were querying why they could not see someone close or someone that knows someone that have been contracted with COVID (Survey Report, 2022). Evidence shows that there is high conviction among Nigerians that COVID-19 is a ruse; either meant to siphon public pulse or big man disease and weapon of the developed countries to deal with themselves. Up till now, government is unable to demystify all these misconceptions.

As usual, government failed to account properly for the management of donations and other funds from appropriations raised to finance COVID-19 pandemic. This ignited several allegation of mismanagement of COVID-19 funds from Nigerians, especially the coalition of Civil Society Organisations. There were more than N99bn and millions of dollar recorded donations from an individuals, domestic and international organisations (BudgIT Report on COVID-19 Fund, 2021).

CSOs alleged massive looting and spending shrouded in secrecy. An empirical report also suggest citizen’s perceived massive corruption in combating and responding to the pandemic (Afrobarometer, 2022). This was a major concern of the respondents during the interviews and FGDs.

In addition, most countries of the world launched several welfare schemes to help the citizens to survive the effects of the pandemic. For instance, Afghanistan, Belgium, South Africa, Canada, United States governments have varying degree of social schemes. Specifically, Afghanistan government provided free bread to the poor in Kabul with more than 1.5million beneficiaries; Canada also have greater support for Indigenous communities, and have spent more than \$290 billion in direct aid to households and firms, including wage subsidies, payments to workers without sick leave, parental support, etc.; United States have social scheme for older Americans, and others at high risk etcetera (IMF COVID-19 Policy Tracker, July 2, 2021). In Nigeria, there were social economic policies and programmes as cash transfer (\$52 to the poor registered in National Social Register), food assistance by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, economic stimulus from Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and the palliative. Unfortunately, impact, transparency and transparency of the schemes are under questioning. Evidence shown that people neither heard of the schemes nor benefitted from it. However, millions of dollar have been stated released for the schemes. Varying number of other studies had previously alleged that there are very poor people who have not received anything from the government during the lockdown (Eniola April 29, 2020; Afrobarometer, 2022) while CSOs alleged massive corruption (Sahara Reporters, New York Mach 31, 2022). Although, the representatives of the leading agencies in the management of the pandemic especially the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development stated that each state government was responsible and had been saddled for organising the distribution of items and cash transfers in its localities, little fraction of the population received the relief materials and cash transfer. Aside government officials, most Nigerians partook in this study claimed only aware of the schemes and materials on media (see Figure 8). It was noted that the federal and state governments involved handed the palliatives over for political settlement and benefits which resulted into stockpiling of the foods and other relief materials. The transparency and accountability of various programmes were highly compromised.

Figure 8: Access to COVID-19 relief assistance



Source: Afrobarometer, 2022

Essentially, the last straw that broke the camel's back is the deep-seated disappointment and anger exhibited by the deeply hungry citizens, especially youths, when they found a number of hidden palliative warehouses across states of the federation including FCT. On October 8, 2020, the youth of the country began a protest with the hashtag #ENDSARS# aimed at curbing police brutality. Amid the protests was the strangest occurrence that saw the discovery of a large warehouse in Mazamaza Lagos where COVID-19 palliatives were stored. Looting of palliatives operation began in Lagos, Nigeria on Thursday, October 22, 2020. With justification that the government officials must have hidden it for personal gain, the angry and hungry masses descended on the supplies and emptied the warehouse within hours. This opened the eyes of other protesting youths in other states such as Oyo, Edo, Kwara, Plateau, Enugu, Anambra, Osun, Taraba, Kaduna, Adamawa, and Delta. Abia, Cross River, FCT and others to locate and loot COVID-19 palliative warehouses (The Guardian Newspaper, October 30, 2020). Unfortunately, the lootings were fuel further because of spiraling food prices, high unemployment rate and anti-police brutality protests that turned violent in October, completely eroding trust in government and its officials. After the looting of the noticed government warehouses, the hoodlums hijacked the event and descended on the politicians across the countries where it's on record their houses and other investments were looted and burnt (Punch Newspaper, October 26, 2020). Private business, individual houses and investments were looted in Oyo, Lagos, Osun, Kwara, Adamawa, Plateau, and few others. Oyo Central Senatorial District accounted constituency projects and looted materials as over 350 motorcycles, 400 deep freezers, 350 generators, grinding machines, sewing machines, hairdressing and barbing salon materials, vulcanising machines and many more (Premium Times October 5, 2020).

However, the broken trust that significantly reduced the already rotten public trust in government and its officials from the events described above was that despite the fact the country has flattened the curve of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the economy fully reopened, some of the palliatives meant to cushion the sufferings of the masses at the peak of the pandemic, when the economy was practically shutdown, were not giving to the intended beneficiaries. A survey alleged government sharing of the palliatives to politicians, party members and loyalists without taking hungry Nigerians into consideration (Okeowo, et al. 2021).

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Based on the discussion so far, the study established that the public trust issue orchestrated by government inability to provide public goods such as security, employment opportunities, education, health services, level of corruption, poor economic management, lack of transparency and accountability in the affairs of the government, etc. had greatly affected the efforts and investments to management the pandemic. Unfortunately, the level of current public trust was further fractured by the way the Nigeria government manages the COVID-19 pandemic, especially, the lack of transparency and accountability on the donations and allocations, cash transfer, and the distribution of the relief materials also known as palliatives which later escalated and resulted into anger, attacks and spontaneous looting of the government owned stores, politician houses and private individuals investments. In order to build public trust and enhance public supports on government interventions in Nigeria, the following are specifically consider as policy options and recommendations:

- a) First, how do the Nigerian state insulate major institutions as Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC); Nigerian Police, Military and Intelligence Agencies; Central

Bank of Nigeria (CBN); Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC); Auditor-General of the Federation; Attorney-General of the Federation; etc. from political interferences. To guard democracy, ensuring reliability, and importantly promoting public trust in critical institutions, a constitutional amendment is proposed for a special committee including the representatives of parliament, judiciary, executive, civil society groups, youth groups, intelligence agencies, etc. to see to the appointment of leadership and day-to-day operation of the agencies above. Candidates to be considered for the leadership position should neither must have been a member nor have interest in membership of political party. This, to a large extent, will strengthen the agencies and bring sanity into the government affairs.

- b) Second, there is a need to promote citizens' engagements at all levels and decisions of government. Engaged citizens can play a critical role in making public institutions more transparent, accountable and effective, and contribution innovative solutions to public issues. For instance, citizens and CSOs inclusion in the distribution of the palliatives and the management of the cash transfer scheme would have save the government from the mess of the whole thing;
- c) Third, criminalizing act of carrying out government activities in secrecy among government officials. In this, implementing the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act is important at this critical period. All officials must understand the importance of being transparent and accountable to any of the public activities, especially the important public good.
- d) Fourth, government needs to be proactive in attending to citizens' concerns and welfare. Services such as education, health, employment creation, institutionalized welfare safety net for unemployed and senior citizens, etc. are key to redeem the image of the government. The ongoing strike in the Nigerian universities because of lecturer's welfare and infrastructure development is damaging when there are information of corruption involving hundreds of billions of naira among the officials and institutions of the government. By extension, there is also need to attend to the welfare of the health workers and improving health facilities. This will go a long way in promoting the public trust. Therefore, government should avail the citizens proper and adequate social security nets that will help cushion the effect of poverty and unemployment and increase people faith in government. Social amenities and infrastructures are currently in bad shape and deserve every attention to fix them.

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