

Citizens' Perception of Political Trust in The Nigerian Government on COVID-19 Management

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Abstract: This study evaluates the political trust in the Nigerian government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Theoretically, the study is hinged on the Socio-Cognitive Trust Model which posits trust as a mental state (cognitive beliefs and goals); determined by the reciprocal deterministic relationship between an individual, the environment, and behaviour. The study acquired data from previous scholarly publications. Political trust has been identified as a key determinant in citizens' relationship with their government; their acceptance of regulations, measures, and policies; and their compliance with rules. In Nigeria, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was low compliance with the restrictive lockdown measures, due mostly to lack of information, distrust, and discontentment with the Nigerian government policies. There were reports of looting of palliative materials, food, drugs and clothing, during the pandemic. Also, there was resistance to COVID-19 testing and vaccination, disbelief in its existence and civil protests. All these are indications of the chronic dearth of political trust in Nigeria. Though the Nigerian government seem to have overcome the menace of the pandemic and is at the recovery stage, it is still important to continue building citizens' trust, for the success of any government. The study recommends intensification of the call for political restructuring and economic divergence as the means of strengthening the overall capacity of the Nigerian government in handling emergencies. The study also noted that improving political and social trust would play a pivotal role in determining how citizens accept and comply with governmental policies and regulations.

Keywords: COVID-19, Nigerian government, Political trust, Socio-cognitive Trust Model

JEL Classification: D72, G18, G28

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic devastated the global community at an alarming rate as it defied all conventional approaches to curtail it. COVID-19 pandemic was declared a health crisis and proved to quickly become a political crisis. Its complex, global and interdependent nature necessitated the urgent need for governments worldwide to find a solution to curb the menace. All the various levels, agents and actors of government across diverse sectors were compelled to deliberate, and collaborate efforts, to develop various, well-coordinated and effective public health policies. Wide range of restrictive measures and lockdown orders, such as mask-wearing, movement restrictions, closure of shops, markets, schools, and religious centres, ban on mass gatherings, socio-economic and religious activities were imposed on citizens. These measures exacerbated political and

social tensions as they were perceived to be against the citizens' constitutional rights and freedom. The relationship between citizens and their governments was therefore greatly tested.

Political trust, which is essentially the citizens' trust in their leaders and government is a key determinant in citizens' relationship with their government; citizens' acceptance of regulations, measures, and policies; and ultimately, citizens' compliance with rules. The importance of political trust cannot be over-emphasized, as the government strive to effectively manage the economy and totally overcome the consequences of the extreme restrictive measures imposed, to curtail the menace of COVID-19. The citizens' acceptance and compliance with the public health policies is essential to the success of these restrictive measures and to saving of lives. It is as such important to interrogate and assess political trust during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, concentrating on the Nigerian government. In recent studies, political trust has been found to be positively associated with compliance with COVID-19 government limitations (Devine, Gaskell, & Jennings, 2020). However, not much research work has been done on this concept in sub-Saharan Africa, and indeed in Nigeria. This study set out to bridge this gap and contribute to theory formation. It sets out to examine determinants of political trust in the Nigerian government during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how citizens attributed trust to their government, regarding the management of the pandemic.

This study would be hinged theoretically on the Socio-Cognitive Model of Trust, as developed by Castelfranchi and Falcone (2005), as it gives a distinct and rich analysis of trust, thus allowing for an extensive probe of not only the degree by which citizens express trust towards their government but also on what basis such expression was based.

Stemming from the above, this study, therefore consider political trust as a potential explanatory factor for adherence to the public health policies in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study seeks to explore the extent to which citizens have trust in the activities of the government and accept policies formulated to curb the menace of the COVID-19 pandemic.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS TRUST

Trust is a complex social construct, which can be defined and categorized in many ways. It is widely and commonly defined as "the willingness of a person, the trustor, to be vulnerable to

the actions of another person, the trusted, based on the expectation that the trusted will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control him/her” (Mayer et al, 1995). Trust is the foundation of all human connections and institutional relationships. It can be defined as one party's readiness to rely on the other side to maintain its agreements. (Mishler 1997; Tonkiss et al. 2000; Blind 2007). Trust has been described as the readiness to expose oneself to another based on a resemblance of intents or values (Earle and Michael, 2008). It can be fundamentally relational and situational (Van der Meer and Zmerli, 2017). Hardin said trust can be explained as “A trusts B to do X” (Hardin 2002). Bauer further added the concept of time to Hardin’s definition. He indicated that trust may change over time, that is, “A trusts B to do X at T” (Bauer & Freitag, 2017). In short, trust is defined as a belief, as a decision and as an action.

Political Trust

Political trust is a ‘very thin form of trust’ characterized by a ‘kind of general expectation that on the whole, political leaders will act according to the rules of the game’ (Sonja & Newton, 2011). It refers to citizens’ confidence in core political institutions (Zmerli, 2014). It is an evaluation by citizens that their government will act in ways that are consistent with the well-being of the citizens without being monitored (Miller and Ola, 1990). It is assumed that when the public is delighted with policy outcomes, the economy is growing, citizens are impressed with authorities and institutions, corruption cases are non-existent, crime is minimal, a war is popular, and the country is endangered, and social capital is high, the public is more trusting (Parker, Glenn, & Terri, 2014). When citizens trust the government, they are more likely to comply with rules and regulations, thereby reducing enforcement and governance cost (Marien & Hooghe, 2011; Murphy, 2004). Political trust develops as citizens appraise their government, its institutions, its policy-making processes, and their individual political leaders as promise-keeping, efficient, fair, and honest. A high level of trust in government is desired as it promotes healthy government-citizens relations, especially in governments where regulatory enforcement is weak, as in several African countries (Aberbach & Walker, 1970; Evans, Holtemeyer, & Kosec, 2019). Trust in government may provide “governance capital” that gets citizens to cooperate with the government even when it makes unpopular decisions whose benefits will accrue only in the long run (Bratton et al. 2005). Public trust in institutions, especially in government, is important to achieving the triangle of freedom, that is, stability, peace and development, in each and every nation. Trust increases confidence in governmental institutions and consequently, leads to citizens cooperation with set policies and programs of the government. The eighth secretary-general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon (2007-2016) stated at the 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government, 2007 that “Building trust in government is at the core of the world’s quest for peace and well-being. The ability of

the global community to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, ensure security, and promote adherence to basic standards of human rights depends on whether or not people have confidence in their government.”

Political trust, however, does not exist or operate in a vacuum. Other forms of trust such as social trust is inseparable from the notion of political trust. Social trust refers to citizens’ confidence in one another as members of a community. “It involves one’s trust in people we come across in daily life, whether we know them or not and whether they are like us or not” (Newton et al., 2018). Social trust has been found to be an important factor of social cohesion, stability and integration of societies (Newton et al., 2018). It plays a significant role at the societal and individual level (Delhey, 2014). At the individual level, social trust is linked to happiness, prosperity, better health, long life, and a sense of social belonging (Newton et al., 2018). Furthermore, social trust has been associated with cooperative and altruistic behaviour (Uslaner, 2002; Delhey, 2014). Trusting individuals are more likely to join voluntary associations, hence they engage in more interactions with other people, compared to less trusting individuals (Stolle, 2001). By contrast, distrustful individuals tend to have less opportunity for interactions and as such, often have a smaller social network (Yamagishi, 2001).

Determinants of political trust in Nigeria government include interpersonal trust, media, interest in public affairs, religious members, political participation, individual well-being, economy performance, and handling of national issues. Governments need citizens, as much as citizens need governments. The main of this connection is mutual trust, which legitimizes the government. Governments need citizens for economic reasons, taxes and political purposes. Citizens also need governments for economic and political purposes, to provide jobs, laws, regulations, safety, education, healthcare, and public services. To continually gain citizens’ trust, governments need to deliver visible results on promises made. When governments fail to live up to citizens’ expectations, citizens remain insecure and political distrust would develop.

Political Distrust

Political distrust or lack of trust in government can pose serious challenge to the functioning of the government. Political distrust can be seen as a relational attitude that reflects perceptions of untrustworthiness towards the government, in its entirety or its components. The evaluative component of distrusting attitudes is clearly negative and implies the expectation of unfavourable outcomes. Internal cognitive judgments that consciously or unconsciously give rise to this attitude are referred to as perceptions of untrustworthiness. Similarly, political distrust is described as a rational response of people to a system that is not working for the majority (Clark 2016). Governments can hardly govern effectively when a substantial proportion of the citizenry distrust them. Political distrust contributes to limiting citizens’

compliance with government rules and cutting ties with government activities and processes (Bertsou, 2019). Other factors which, however, determines citizens' compliance with governmental regulations and policies, apart from distrust include level of education, personal well-being, social status, politic participation, and ideological positioning (Norris, 2011). The major drivers of political distrust include poor quality of governance, technical incompetence, poor economic performance, information manipulation, mutual suspicions, non-provision of basic needs and services, political corruption, and general exclusion (Irohama, 2012; Khan, 2016; Rafaty, 2018; Carlisle, 2020). In Nigeria, large-scale corruption as well as inability to deliver on electoral promises and dividends of democracy, are exacerbating political distrust (Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). Ethnic politics, class inequalities, and past government failures to respond to health emergencies are among factors fuelling political distrust in Nigeria (Ezeibe & Ikeanyibe, 2017; Ikeanyibe et al., 2018).

III. REVIEW OF PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Nnamani, Ngoka, Okoye, and Nwoke (2022) investigated the Nigerian state and the reality of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, including political reorganisation and economic diversification. The study analysed the efficiency of state capacity in containing the COVID-19 outbreak in Nigeria. Based on the operational, fiscal, and political components of the state's capacity, this study contends that the Nigerian state's containment measures were severely hampered by a lack of trust, over-centralisation of policy responses, and declining revenue caused by structural and institutional deficiencies. The study utilised a qualitative approach centered on the documentary and content analysis technique and ex-post facto research design. The study reiterates the importance of political restructuring and economic diversification in boosting the Nigerian state's overall capacity to manage emergencies.

Agbo and Nche (2022) examined church leaders' perceptions of the government's commitment to combatting COVID-19 in Nigeria. The study explored church leaders' perceptions of the trustworthiness of COVID-19 figures and other government responses in Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 church leaders from Nigeria's Anglican, Catholic, and Pentecostal churches. In thematic data organising and analysis, a descriptive narrative method was used. Only one person expressed confidence in the credibility of the COVID-19 numbers and other government responses, according to the findings. Except for one undecided person, the remaining participants were divided into those who feel the numbers and other government initiatives are inflated and those who believe they are fake. The study also discovered that denominational affiliation influenced judgments of the reliability of COVID-19 figures and other government replies.

Cole, Baker, and Stivas (2021) evaluated COVID-19's trust, openness, and international learning. The study involved a

reflexivity exercise centred on trust and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the cognitive domains of the medical and social sciences, common understandings of trust are mapped out across disciplinary boundaries and explored. While context is important in terms of how concepts such as trust and transparency are understood and applied, comparison across academic fields and experiences gathered from country experiences allows broad propositions to be established for further investigation. International health problems necessitate measures to repair trust, defined broadly as a relationship based on trusteeship, in the sense of mutual obligations in a global common, where trust is a critical public benefit. Individuals (responsible for following recommendations) who trust intermediaries (health experts) and are responsive to messages (nudges) from relevant governmental bodies have the most successful pandemic responses. As a result, when patients and citizens are asked to be active players in the virus's struggle, the line between hard medical and soft social science blurs. Building on the diagnosis of a trust crisis (in health security and across several tiers of governance), the paper renews demands to restore confidence through increased transparency.

Muyiwa (2021) examined the impact of governance politics on coronavirus management in Nigeria. The study investigated how excellent governance affected the coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria. The study's fundamental point is the inherent link between good governance, bad governance, and a coronavirus pandemic in a democratic society. The study's respondents were chosen using a multi-stage sampling technique. 209 of the 230 respondents included in the study completed the questionnaire correctly. The study's findings indicate a considerable favourable association between governance and health information ($r = .581^{**}$, $N = 219$, $P < .05$); citizen and good governance ($r = .485^{**}$, $N = 219$, $P < .05$) and good governance and the management of Coronavirus pandemic ($r = .431^{**}$, $N = 219$, $P < .05$). As a result, it demonstrates the need for the government to win public trust to develop a policy that will enhance and support the mitigation of the Coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

Okaisabor (2021) researched the obstacles, consequences, and perceptions of public initiatives in Nigeria in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study examined the impact of government policies and measures in Nigeria to combat the COVID-19 outbreak. Methodically, it only uses secondary data sources. It assesses Nigeria's readiness prior to the detection of the index case, as well as obstacles in early response and support against COVID-19; it also reveals several failed policies that exacerbate the COVID-19 situation in the country. The study did not hesitate to observe the level of progress made thus far by the government through some of its policies and measures in restraining the spread of the pandemic – especially through the successful management of COVID-19 patients, resulting to a high number of discharged cases and low death rate. However, it finds that disbelief in COVID-19's existence, which has recently been responsible

for community transmission, must be dispelled through a risk-communication approach to eradicate the virus.

Wonodi, Obi-Jeff, Adewumi, Keluo-Udeke, Gur-Arie, Krubiner, Jaffe, Bamiduro, Karron, Faden (2021) assessed the implications of COVID-19 conspiracy theories and misinformation in Nigeria for vaccination demand generation communications. The study scientifically elicits misinformation and conspiracy theories regarding COVID-19 circulating among the Nigerian population to uncover significant themes and appropriate message framing for communication initiatives to boost vaccine uptake. The authors conducted 22 focus group talks and 24 key informant interviews with 178 participants from six states representing the six geopolitical zones from February 1 to 8, 2021. Participants were carefully chosen from a pool of sub-national programme managers, healthcare staff, and community people. Using a framework analysis approach, all interviews were iteratively analysed. A total of 33 different conspiracy theories or misinformation concerning the COVID-19 virus, pandemic response, or vaccination were elicited from participants. The study noted further that all respondents have had heard some misinformation. The main argument was that COVID-19 did not exist, and politicians took advantage of the circumstance and misappropriated monies. People believed such allegations because they distrusted the government, did not understand Christian doctrine, or had no personal experience with COVID-19. The study is the first to present a thematic analysis of the extent of COVID-19 disinformation in Nigeria. The findings shed light on why people accept these beliefs, which could aid the vaccination programme in improving demand generation communication for COVID-19 vaccines by focusing on spurious claims.

Davies, Lalot, Peitz, Heering, Ozkececi, Babaian, Hayon, Broadwood, and Abrams (2021) investigated the ramifications of shifts in political trust in the United Kingdom during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The research examined at changes in political trust in the United Kingdom throughout the course of 2020 to assess wider implications for the continued management of the COVID-19 pandemic. From December 2019 to October 2020, data retrieved from 18 survey organisations with measures of political trust (general, leadership, and COVID-19-related) were analysed. The researchers examined the percentages of trust and distrust across time to see where big changes coincided with national events. Following the 2019 UK General Election, political trust was low. They surged during the start of the UK lockdown in March 2020, but then fell steadily for the rest of the year, returning to pre-COVID levels by October 2020. Inability to maintain the heightened political trust obtained at the start of the pandemic is likely to have made managing public confidence and behaviour more difficult, highlighting the necessity for ways to maintain trust levels when dealing with future crises.

Islam, Mahmud, and Ahmed (2021) examined social media users' perceptions of misinformation and knowledge about government efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic in

Bangladesh. The study's goal is to learn about social media users' faith in the government during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh. The Internet of Things Users' faith in government is assessed based on perceived disinformation and understanding of government responses to the epidemic at that time. According to the study, social media users who perceive less misinformation have a better understanding of government actions. As a result, greater understanding of those measures predicts more trust in government. The study also shows that a higher level of trust in government can help people get more understanding about government policies in the face of disinformation. The findings show that a proclivity to trust based on government performance rating, individual and social values and beliefs, and a culture of trusting institutions may all play a role in shaping how people perceive misinformation and knowledge about government measures.

Ajibo (2020) investigated the impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian socioeconomic well-being, health system pandemic preparedness, and the role of Nigerian social workers in the Covid-19 fight. The study was aimed to particularly determine the impact of Covid-19 on Nigerians' socioeconomic well-being, the health sector's readiness to deal with the pandemic, and the role of Nigerian social workers in the fight against Covid-19 in Nigeria. In its investigation, the study used a phenomenological and exploratory research design. The sample size for the study was sixteen people. The instruments for data gathering were a focus group discussion guide and an in-depth interview guide. The study's findings indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a detrimental influence on Nigerians' socioeconomic well-being. Second, the Nigerian health system is unprepared to deal with the Covid-19 outbreak. Third, Nigerian social professionals, particularly medical social workers, have played an important role in disseminating knowledge about Covid-19 prevention measures to the general populace. The report proposed that the Nigerian government should wake up and improve the health system and make it proactive to manage epidemics/pandemics in the future. The government should promote social work practise in Nigeria by institutionalising the profession.

Ezeibe, Ilo, Ezeibe, Oguonu, Nwankwo, Ajaero and Osadebe (2020) examined political distrust and COVID-19 spread in Nigeria. The study used a qualitative dominant mixed methods approach that included phone interviews and a survey of 120 educated Nigerians chosen at random from four COVID-19 most afflicted states: Lagos, Oyo, Kano, and Rivers, as well as the FCT, Abuja. The study also relied on secondary data on the transmission of COVID-19 in Nigeria collected from Nigeria Centre for Diseases Control from 27 February to 31st August 2020. The study discovered that political corruption fuels widespread political distrust. This reduces public compliance with official protocols, limits the results of government responses to COVID-19, and aids the virus's spread in Nigeria. The study concluded that enhancing government accountability in public sector management is

important for fostering public trust, encouraging citizens to follow COVID-19 safety measures, and preventing the spread of the pandemic in Nigeria and worldwide.

Madueke, Iheonu, and Ololo (2020) assessed the implications of post-Covid-19 pandemic for good governance and development in Nigeria. As noted by the authors, Nigeria is going through a perilous time in history as the country is faced with a devastating effect brought about by the deadly spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures put in place to curtail the adverse shock of the deadly virus are nothing short of calamitous as they have exposed the Nigerian government's inefficiencies. Many Nigerians have died because of police/military brutality, malnutrition, and starvation, among other factors. The discourse, centred on a structural-functional explanatory tool of analysis popularised by Spencer Herbert, and Talcott Parsons, among others, highlighted the relationship between the many social institutions and the structures that made up the society. According to the theory's proponents, society is a system with interdependent elements that work together to ensure the stability of the whole. To achieve stability and good governance in Nigeria, Nigerian leaders must develop numerous institutions and critical areas of the country's economy, including healthcare, tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, and solid minerals. Nigeria must diversify its revenue base and build appropriate buffers and resilience to exogenous shocks. They must confront the infrastructural deterioration, institutional flaws, and pervasive corruption that have plagued her since her independence.

Chukwuma, Bossert, and Croke (2019) investigated the delivery of health care and political trust in Nigeria. Do advancements in health-care delivery impact Africans' trust in political leaders? The study used a national intervention that improved health service delivery in 500 Nigerian primary health care facilities to estimate the impact of residents within 10 kilometres of one or more of the intervention facilities on trust in the president, local councils, the ruling party, and opposition parties. Using difference-in-difference models, the researchers discovered that proximity to the intervention improved trust in the president and the ruling party. The study, on the other hand, finds little indication of increasing trust in municipal government or opposition parties. The study also investigates the effect of ethnicity and religious affiliation in moderating observed gains in presidential confidence. While there is a considerable literature demonstrating that ethnic, geographic, or religious identification typically mediates both intervention targeting and citizen reaction to interventions, the analysis finds no evidence that the intervention was aimed at the president's ethnic group, zone, or state of origin. Furthermore, there is some indication that the intervention enhanced trust in the president among individuals who did not share the president's markers of identity.

Iroghama (2012) did an examination of citizens' trust in the Nigerian government. The study is an attempt to bridge the gap from a public policy standpoint. A microlevel examination of public opinion survey data (question by

question) was employed in this study to determine empirical links between political trust in Nigeria. The assessments were based on the fourth round of the Afrobarometer survey, which was conducted in 2008. Descriptive statistics offer context for the sample, whereas multivariate logistic regression with SPSS was used to model Nigerian residents' trust in the government. The study discovered that political trust or faith in governments in Nigeria is influenced by several factors. These are economic strength, media, public interest, religious membership, political engagement, interpersonal trust, a lack of fundamental requirements, and corruption management. Furthermore, interpersonal trust and government management of corruption issues are the most influential variables influencing trust in government. Those who indicated interpersonal trust also said they trusted the government. While those that believe the governments are combating or handling corruption nicely likely to confidence in the government.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Socio-Cognitive Model of Trust. The model analyses the basic elements on which trust is founded in terms of the cognitive components of the trustor. According to Thagard (1998), socio-cognitive trust is based on a cognitive representation of the mental state of trust (beliefs, goals). The model does not account for more implicit forms of trust (for example, trust by default, which is not based on explicit evaluations, beliefs, previous experience, or other sources) or affective dimensions of trust, which are based on emotional responses and an intuitive, unconscious appraisal rather than explicit evaluations.

The model includes two main basic beliefs:

Competence Belief: A thorough assessment of Y's abilities is required. X must feel that Y is valuable for this objective, that Y can produce/provide the desired outcome, and that Y can play such a part in X's plan/action.

Willingness Belief: X should believe that Y is not only capable and capable of performing that action/task, but that Y will accomplish what X requires (under given circumstances). Because of this notion, the trustee's action is predictable.

Another important belief for trust is:

Dependence Belief: X believes -in order to trust and delegate to Y- that either X requires it, X depends on it (strong reliance), or that it is preferable for X to rely on it rather than not rely on it (weak dependence). In other words, when X trusts someone, X finds itself in a strategic situation: X believes that there is interference and that his incentives, the outcomes of his project, are dependent on the actions of another actor Y.

Applying the model to this study, the Nigeria citizens voted and appointed various leaders whom they trust to perform the basic functions of government which include the provision of public services (education, health, transportation, etc.), maintenance of law and order, securing lives and properties,

and provision of economic assistance. During Covid-19 pandemic, a lot of events played out nationwide. The Nigerian government in the pursuit of curtailing the pandemic and securing the life of citizens, provided testing facilities and isolation centres. Notable business organisations, especially from the banking and manufacturing sectors, also collaborated and provided financial assistance, food and essential drugs, to be distributed to citizens whose movements was restricted. However, the politicians who were saddled with the responsibility of distributing these relief materials hoarded it until the storehouses were found by the youths and looted. So many complaints was made by the citizens over this. The government through its various state governments and agencies, defended the government and claimed that the items were not hoarded. That, rather, they were being kept safe to be distributed a few days before they were looted. Incidences such as this, no doubt, has reduced the political trust which the citizens have in their government.

V. METHODOLOGY

This paper provides an evaluation of citizens' political trust in Nigerian government during the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of citizens' acceptance and compliance to policies and measures taken to curb the menace of the pandemic. The study relied on available literature and scholarly publications in acquiring relevant information. This entails the use of secondary data, or data obtained earlier by other researchers (Ohaja, 2003; Sydney 2019). This approach was chosen because it can quickly generate data from other researchers' conclusions for this study, allowing the difficulties raised to be discussed explicitly.

VI. DISCUSSION

Citizens' Perception of the Nigerian Government on Covid-19 Management

The novel outbreak of COVID-19 was reported from Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China in December 2019. Its continued widespread and prevalent nature across the world necessitated the World Health Organisation (WHO) to declare SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes the disease COVID-19) as a global pandemic on the 12th of March 2020 (WHO, 2021; Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021). The Nigerian government, like other countries all over the world, adopted several public health policies and measures to effectively control the pandemic situation (Dixit, Ogundeji & Onwujekwe, 2021). COVID-19 pandemic was possibly, the most difficult test of government capability in the new millennium. It took everyone off guard and nations had to act promptly, collaboratively, and thoroughly, to curtail its spread and menace. The mitigation measures introduced and implemented include strict lockdowns, movement restrictions, masks, social distancing measures, and the ban on large public gatherings including shops, churches, and mosques. The success of these measures is however dependent on Citizens' cooperation and compliance, based on their trust in government and its institutions. As a result, the pandemic was

a litmus test for public trust between the ruling government and its citizens.

Political trust is a critical factor for effective crisis management at any time, and governments which lack such trust are at a significant disadvantage. In Nigeria, the restrictive lockdown measures were mostly, forcefully implemented on the citizens during the pandemic, thereby infringing on their constitutional rights and freedom. This exacerbated power imbalances and further undermines the citizens' trust in government. Other effects of the pandemic, such as high level of vaccination apprehension, a projected recession, and higher expectations of government assistance imply that continual efforts must be made to develop and maintain citizens' trust in government (Mwangi, 2021).

Studies show that, Nigerian citizens do not usually effectively comply with the various government measures as they do not trust their government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of the population of the country, Nigeria, failed to comply with the restrictive lockdown measures, due to lack of information, distrust, and discontentment with the Nigerian government policy decisions (Chukwuma, Bossert & Croke, 2019; Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021; Agbo & Nche, 2022). This indicates the chronic dearth of citizens' trust in the Nigerian government.

Citizens in Northern Nigeria, for example, were skeptical of government's efforts to combat the menace of the COVID-19 pandemic, owing to the government's failure to eradicate Boko Haram, polio, and other life-threatening crises in the region after several years of engagement (Hoechner, 2020; Onapajo & Adebisi, 2020). Political distrust during the COVID-19 era in Nigeria manifests in citizens' non-compliance with the various governmental policies and measures, such as stay-at-home orders, inter-state travels, curfews, closure of public gatherings exceeding fifty persons, wearing of face masks, and maintaining personal hygiene. Other manifestations of citizens' resistance include the escape of patients from isolation centres, and protest of patients in isolation centre (Ezeibe, et al. 2020).

Furthermore, there were reports of Nigerian youths looting palliatives from different warehouses nationwide during the COVID-19 lockdown period (The Nations, 2020). Several warehouses for palliatives were plundered in Lagos, Cross River, Osun, Kwara, Oyo, Kaduna, Plateau, and other states in Nigeria. Packaged clothing, drugs and food items such as garri, rice, spaghetti, noodles, and vegetable oil were stolen. This looting can be attributed to the frustration and desperation of the Nigerian citizens for survival. The Nigerian government has been unable to provide necessary support and basic amenities for the needs of its citizens, who were then, under the lockdown enforcement rules and as such unable to appropriately cater for themselves. The looters infact claimed they only took what belonged to them.

Also, various rumours as regards the management of the COVID-19 pandemic by Nigerian government sprung up. These rumours flared up angers and frustrations of the

Nigerian citizens, especially the youths and they came out in droves, to protest. For example, it was asserted that the government was hoarding and saving the COVID-19 pandemic palliative food, drugs and clothing materials for their various 2023 electoral campaigns. State governors and other government agencies involved, vehemently denied this. They stated that the palliatives were not being stockpiled, but that they were still being received and was being processed in readiness for distribution, when the looting occurred. (Premium Times, 2020).

There were also several incidences of jailbreaks, property destruction, and huge looting of government warehouses and private enterprises, during the pandemic period. The citizens who have been denied their constitutional rights to freedom and were under lockdown, had totally lost faith in the government and took decisions into their hands. The federal government was also accused of misappropriating funds meant for the management of the COVID-19 pandemic (BBC, 2020). All of these incidences further eroded citizens' trust in the government and strained the relationship between the citizens and their ruling government.

According to the empirical evidence, Nnamani et al (2022), in his study of the Nigerian state and the realities of handling the COVID-19 epidemic, speculated on political restructuring and economic diversification. He concluded that the Nigerian government's containment tactics were severely hampered by a lack of confidence, over-centralisation of policy actions, and diminishing revenue caused by structural and institutional flaws. Muyiwa (2021) demonstrated that there is a positive and significant relationship between governance and health information and good governance and the management of Coronavirus pandemic in a democratic state in an argument of the intrinsic nexus between good governance, bad governance, and COVID-19 pandemic in a democratic state. The report urged the government to win public trust in order to develop a policy that will improve and promote the mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Okaisabor (2021) gave an assessment of Nigeria's preparation prior to the detection of the index case, as well as issues in early response and support against COVID-19 pandemic. It also discussed certain failed policies that exacerbated the country's COVID-19 situation. The study did not overlook the government's level of success in slowing the spread of the pandemic through some of its other policies and measures, particularly through efficient management of COVID-19 pandemic patients, which resulted in a high number of discharged cases and low death rate. However, it pointed out that disbelief in COVID-19 pandemic's existence, which had recently been responsible for community transmission, must be dispelled through a risk-communication approach in order to further curtail the pandemic. In a similar study, Wonodi et al (2021) investigated misinformation and conspiracy theories regarding COVID-19 pandemic, which is circulating among the Nigerian population to discover significant themes and appropriate message framing for communication efforts to enhance vaccine acceptance. According to the findings of this

study, all participants had received some misinformation, leading to the perception that COVID-19 pandemic was not real, and that politicians took advantage of the situation and misappropriated funds. The citizens believed so many claims and rumours due to their distrust of government.

Political corruption, according to Ezeibe et al (2020), generated widespread political skepticism. This reduced citizens' compliance with regulations and policies, limited the effectiveness and success of government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and aided the spread of the virus in Nigeria. The study concluded that enhancing government accountability in public sector management is important for fostering public trust, thereby encouraging citizens' compliance with COVID-19 pandemic safety measures, so as to prevent the further spread of the pandemic in Nigeria and worldwide. Madueke et al. (2020) revealed that Nigeria is living in risky times, with the country facing a devastating effect caused by the lethal spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. He claimed that the public health policies and measures put in place to mitigate the deadly virus's impact have brought about nothing short of disastrous outcomes, exposing the Nigerian government's shortcomings.

While it seems Nigeria, like many other African countries have overcome the COVID-19 crisis relatively well up till now, various post-COVID-19 pandemic issues, such as economic recessions, test refusals, and vaccine hesitancy, are indicators of ongoing challenges for political trust in government (Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021). As a further consequence of citizens' distrust, many Nigerian citizens do not willingly comply with government policy regulations and directives. The citizens protest and resist directives. These results to arrests and sometimes even deaths, due to the police/military brutality during enforcement. Many have also committed suicide as they see no hope in the future and believe they have nothing to look up to. A recent consequence of this political distrust in government is the high rate of migration from Nigeria, of highly qualified Nigerians, such as doctors, nurses and accountants. All these are indicative that the citizens believe their ruling government have failed them and they have very low trust in the Nigerian government.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Citizens of Nigeria voted and appointed leaders whom they trust by faith, to perform the basic functions of government, including provision of public services, maintaining law and order, securing lives and properties. Recent experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and other national crises, thereafter, have however been quite unpleasant to the Nigerian citizens. This has led to various uproars and protest even up till date, highlighting citizens' discontentment, frustration and resistance to authority. These experiences include the poor management and accountability during the COVID-19 pandemic, resistance to testing due mainly to its high costs, vaccine hesitancy due to rumours of its consequence, the resulting #EndSars protests nationwide demanding for end to police brutality and bad governance, increase in suicidal

victims, as they have lost faith and had no hope for the future, desperation to migrate to developed countries, causing brain drain. All these are some of the indicators of the chronic dearth of political trust in the Nigerian government.

The importance of citizens' trust in their leaders and government cannot be over-emphasized as it has been identified as a key determinant in citizens' relationship with their government; their acceptance of regulations, measures, and policies; and ultimately, their compliance with rules. As the government strive to effectively manage the economy and totally overcome the consequences of the extreme restrictive measures imposed, to curtail the menace of COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to continue building citizens' trust. The citizens' voluntary acceptance and compliance with set policies and measures contribute greatly to the success of any government policies and measures. Although disobedience and disregard for government's regulations and measures abound globally, trust-building during an emergency such as COVID-19 pandemic allows for achieving the best possible outcomes (Gavin, 2020; Gyimah-Boadi & Logan, 2020). Techniques such as effective communication and transparent processes remain relevant for building trust and promoting citizens' collaboration. These techniques have been widely tested for successfully mitigating COVID-19 pandemic in various countries such as Taiwan, Singapore, and Canada (Migone, 2020; Schrad, 2020).

Other determinants of political trust in Nigeria government include interpersonal trust, media, interest in public affairs, religious members, political participation, individual well-being, economy performance, and handling of national issues. The Nigerian government would need to strive to improve on all these to earn the citizens' trust.

Furthermore,

1. There is a need to intensify the push for political restructuring and economic diversification as a means of strengthening the Nigerian government's inclusive capacities in dealing with crises and emergencies.
2. Nigerian government should empower its core ministries and critical areas of the Nigerian economy, such as healthcare, tourism and hospitality, manufacturing, and solid minerals, to achieve stability and good governance.
3. Nigerian government should consider diversifying its revenue base and build sufficient buffers and resilience to exogenous emergencies.
4. The Nigerian government should actively address the country's infrastructural degradation, institutional deficiencies, and widespread corruption.

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