

Political Leadership and Public Trust in Nigeria: Review of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic Lockdown and End SARS Protest

Iliyasu Biu M¹, Bala Galadima Joji², Rehila Jenis K³, Yusuf Sani⁴

^{1,2}Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

^{3,4}Yakubu Gowon University, Abuja, Nigeria

biu@fuwukari.edu.ng

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Abstract

Public trust is fundamental to good governance, particularly during national crises that require political legitimacy, institutional responsiveness, and public cooperation. This study examines political leadership and public crisis-management strategies during Nigeria's 2020 COVID-19 lockdown and considers their relationship with the subsequent EndSARS mass protests. Grounded in Authentic Leadership Theory, the study investigates citizens' perceptions of governmental trustworthiness by assessing the antecedents, statements, and practices of political leaders during the pandemic. It employs qualitative content analysis of selected speeches delivered by political leaders during the national lockdown and interprets them comparatively in relation to selected global experiences. The analysis suggests that deficiencies in political leadership and crisis communication contributed to declining public trust and intensified public dissatisfaction, which formed an important context for the EndSARS protests. The study therefore reinforces the proposition that the quality of leadership substantially determines the effectiveness of crisis governance and the public's response to governmental actions. It concludes that strengthening public trust in Nigeria requires reforms addressing the institutional and political-cultural

conditions surrounding leadership emergence, supported by constitutional amendments and genuine judicial independence. The study contributes to scholarship on authentic leadership, crisis governance, and political trust by connecting governmental responses during the COVID-19 pandemic with broader patterns of citizen mobilization and demands for accountable governance.

Keywords: Authentic Leadership; COVID-19 Lockdown; EndSARS Protests; Political Leadership; Public Trust

Introduction

Public trust remains a vital component of good governance across all communities and societies in global and local context. The shock waves of the COVID-19 global pandemic in the year 2020 and its fallouts will continue to resonate the realities of preparedness and public trust for political leaders in public crisis management and administration. Thus, this brings to the fore the core argument that;

“Everything rises and falls with the leader”. The extent to which public crisis management is contemplated and addressed, has defined political leaders on whose table the ‘buck stops’. For developing societies as Nigeria amongst others, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 revealed much. (Biu, et.al 2025)

While this study does not insist that one reason (i.e. political leadership or public trust) triggers public crisis, a relationship certainly exists between leadership and the political, economic and social stability of any society. Masciulli, et al. (2006) posits that leadership is an essential feature of all government and governance: weak leadership contributes to government failures, and strong leadership is indispensable if government is to succeed in the long run. Boin, et al. (1996) notes further, that leadership as it confronts natural and man-made threats to society becomes imperative in crisis. This is aptly stated thus:

In time of crisis, citizens look at their leaders: presidents and mayors, local politicians and elected administrators, public managers and top civil servant. We expect these policymakers to avert threats or at least minimize the damage of the crisis at hand. They should lead us out of crisis; they must explain what went wrong and convince us it will not happen again...when policymakers respond well to crisis, the damage is limited; when they

fail, the crisis impact increases. In extreme cases, crisis management involves the difference between life and death.

Obviously, from the primitive age through to the current age of globalization, traditional and new societal problems such as food, healthcare, housing, environmental and climate change management, conflicts and crimes of all kinds have found their answers in leadership and followership. However, this comes with a caveat that human life, its existence and activities within the context of public crisis are not linear and highly predictable as sometimes depicted by science and technology and other bodies of knowledge that provide answers, because of the dynamics and complexities inherent on humanity.

Pointedly, this resonates with Biekart et. al (2023) observations that the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to almost seven million deaths (WHO, 2022), revealed the world to be even more complex and unequal than previously thought. It brought to the fore the need to rethink the fault lines' since global inequalities had clearly worsened (Taylor & Tremblay, 2022 cited in Biekart et. al 2023) as vulnerable people in the Global South suffered most from the consequences of the pandemic.

The narratives encapsulated in assurances, notices of health protocol procedures and public policy compliance and enforcements can be seen in the selected speeches of the president who is the number one political leader in Nigeria and in the buildup to control and downsize the 'corona virus' which had become a global pandemic tagged covid-19. Indeed, this global public crisis localized to almost all nation-states including Nigeria in the year 2020, revealed political leaders' capacities and the elasticity of public trust reposed by citizens on them.

This paper, highlights the problems around the National lockdown in Nigeria during the regime and administration of late President General Muhammadu Buhari (Rtd) as a global strategy to contain the spread of the corona virus. The matters of citizens socio-economic inclusion and exclusion was demonstrated in the way employees in the organized private sector (OPS) lost their jobs, some receiving pay-cuts and others no wages at all.

Similarly the informal sector of the Nigeria economy demonstrated its fragility when subjected to the restriction of human movements during the National lockdown as evidenced in the exacerbated economic hardship which came from this uncommon and unprepared public crisis and invariably emergencies, as well as the backlash of deepen poverty levels, socio-economic crimes and higher mistrust for the Nigerian government and its international

and local development partners in the (mis)management of palliatives and other social and economic intervention programs to ameliorate the covid-19 pandemic.

This paper in subsequent section, will further explore a theoretical corollary with the EndSAR mass protest in pockets of regions across Nigeria as seen in the transfer of aggression (mass looting, vandalization of government properties and attacks on selected public service personnel i.e. policemen etc) and grievances of citizens against their political leaders at the Federal (central government), State (regional) government and local government levels. This is followed by on findings, conclusion and recommendations.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of this paper explores the extent of citizens public trust on political leaders in Nigeria following their management of the global covid-19 pandemic within the lens of the National lockdown strategy and the specific events and outcomes of the EndSAR mass protest.

The specific objectives are the following:

1. To highlight the features of the National lockdown strategy in the year 2020 adopted by the National political leadership to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.
2. Examine specific few selected speeches by the political leader in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis during national lockdown in comparative lens to other global experiences.
3. Attempt to interrogate the public (citizens) perception of trust and response of government when juxtaposed with the 'avoidable' EndSAR mass protest and possible suggestions.

Research Questions

The research objectives herein provide the basis to raise three basic research questions to guide this study with the core argument posited earlier. They are the following:

1. What were the features of the National lockdown strategy adopted by the regime/government of late President Muhammadu Buhari in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and to what extent was it necessary?
2. Can the authentic leadership theory provide the reasons why the political leader's statements (speeches) fall short of the policy actions (palliatives, socio-economic programs) during the COVID-19 National lockdown and thereafter in post COVID-19?

3. Was the EndSAR mass protest the outcome of the (mis)management of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Nigeria and was it avoidable?

Methodology

This paper adopted a desk research method relying heavily on secondary documents. These are books, reports, academic journals, online data sources amongst others. It uses an interpretive content and thematic analysis arising from the available literature which was the basis of the data sets. Importantly, thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method used to search for themes or patterns, and in relation to different epistemological and ontological positions in given data sets (Braun and Clarke 2006).

Conceptual Clarifications and framework

The body of literature emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic global crisis comes in layers of different dimensions. This obviously is contextualized and localized to events around the buildup, the public crisis management led by political leaders across nation-states in partnership with state and state-actors. It is important to dis-aggregate the concepts that fosters understanding of the phenomenon under focus here and the theoretical fundamentals that drive them.

Leadership and Political Leadership

The concept of leadership though most times broad in description and interpretation, is easier grasped in terms of action and inaction. This is obvious given the understanding that the extent of progress or otherwise of any given existence (i.e. man, animals and environment) are predicated on leadership. For clarity the words, 'Lead', 'Leader' and 'Leadership' all point to one direction; being ahead and the head. Chemers (1997) further described leadership as "a process of social influence" in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. This invariably underscores the leadership connection with followership towards meeting the challenges of modern societies.

Brysk (2002), Masciulli & Day (2006) succinctly observed that political leadership and followership account for significant differences between individual nation states as demonstrated in their response to both newer global problems and traditional governance issues, ie, terrorism, insurgency and extremist movements, climate threats and changes, health pandemic seen in the year 2020 covid-19 pandemic globally. It is within this context that a range of ideas are put forward to highlight this phenomenon. Most times, societies

recognizing leadership as the beacon of hope, development and sustenance have sought to understand the energy and driving force of 'good' and 'bad' leadership. Put differently, the ancient query; "are great leaders born or made"? The answer is subject to numerous underlining factors such as the societal political arrangements, institutions and socio-cultural value system in practice.

Hence, Elcock (2001) raises the argument of George Fredrick Hegel (1822) and Thomas Carlyle (1841) that world historical figures or 'Great Men' emerge to change the course of history when they are needed. For Hegel, such 'world historical individuals' are the chosen vessels of the 'spirit' but they may also act from selfish or wicked motives (Plamenntz, 1963, Vol.II:205, cited in Elcock, 2001). Such theories he notes have also been used to justify the actions of leaders who have perpetrated horrors i.e. mass violence contrived in their visions, such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin whose projects transcended all the barriers not just of decency but of simple humanity (Bullock, 1990 cited in Elcock, 2001). In recent times, Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden amongst others come to mind.

However, the law of duality must be kept in mind as one man's hero (leader) maybe another's villain. For example, Stalin's forced collectivization and industrialization of the former Soviet Union in the late 1920s and early 1930s served both to bring about economic change and to reinforce his personal hold on power. However, these aims were achieved at the cost of untold millions of deaths among the populace. The concept of political leadership is remains a subset of leadership, herein it is confined to the space of state and non-state actors and 'what they do in the management of public crisis' that earns them public (dis)trust.

Public Trust

Public trust remains a critical component in the value chain of governance and in Nigeria maybe a concept regarded with mixed feelings and perceptions. First, the issue of trust as observed by many is a multifaceted, complex, and rather ambiguous regarded by many as difficult to define and so also to investigate (Cheema 2010; Van der Meer 2010 cited in Beshi and Kaur 2020). Thus, it is not surprising that so many people, scholars, journalists, funding agencies and governments alike have diversified views on trust.

Despite such diverse views of trust, scholars assumed that trust is a psychological state that involves a willingness to take risks based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of a trustee (Yang 2006). This view is a very important and basic foundation for looking the issue of trust, and all others are just its derivatives. Trust in government, therefore;

refers to citizens' expectations on the type, operation, and interaction of government with the citizenry and the behaviour of political leaders, civil servants and citizens themselves (Cheema 2010).

Thomas (1998) on the contrary claims that trust is based on beliefs rather than expectations. According to him, expectations imply that we are calculating the probabilities individuals will pursue particular courses of action. So, believing that others do good things is considered to be

the weakest form of trust. More considerably, trust in government refers to the level of confidence citizens have in their government to 'do the right thing', to act appropriately and honestly on behalf of the public (Barnes and Gill 2000).

In general, trust refers to a willingness to rely on others to act on our behalf based on the belief that they possess the capacity to make effective decisions and take our interests into account (Houston and Harding 2014). Trust in government is considered as an indispensable for the effective functioning of democratic government. Trust in government is also necessary for the fair and effective functioning of public institutions (Jung and Sea 2012; Parker et al. 2008; Gordon 2000).

According to Jung and Sea (2012), public trust in government is one of the key factors that determine the government's competitiveness. Broadly speaking, public trust in government is important as it speaks to the quality of the relationship that exists between citizens and their government (Porumbescu 2015). Further, one comes across a strong view that, trust in government functions as the glue that keeps the system together and as the oil that lubricates the policy machine (Van der Meer 2010). A number of theorists view improved performance in public services as potential precursors to trust in government while linking distrust mostly to the poor performance of public institution (Yang and Holzer 2006; Christensen and Laegreid 2005; Uslander 2002).

People often demand the government to provide services, such as health, education, security, law enforcement, electricity, transportation, water, and waste management. In fact, citizens view government performance not only from the perspective of service delivery, but, also from the efficacy and fairness of government policy and government ethics (Yang and Holzer 2006). In any case, if there is any mismatch between public's expectation and the actual performance of government institutions, the public may be forced to consider public employees as incompetent, wasteful, dishonest, and untrustworthy (Kim 2005).

In the contrast, citizens' perceptions of public sector performance can influence citizens' perceptions of the ability, benevolence and integrity dimension of trustworthiness by demonstrating that the public sector possesses a set of skills and resources needed to guide society in a desirable direction (Porumbescu 2013). Therefore, a more positive perception with governmental services is seen as a way of restoring trust in government, in contrast; the opposite is true when the public develops a negative perception. As stated above, trust in government is a key element of good governance and may be built up with sound policies that promote people's safety and security (Popovski 2010).

COVID-19

On the 31st December 2019, World Health Organization (WHO) was alerted to several cases of pneumonia in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. On 7th January 2020, Chinese authorities confirmed that a new virus had been identified as the causative agent. The new virus, a member of the Coronavirus family, is known to cause disease in humans and animals and, primarily, spreads through droplets. Following the rapid escalation of the outbreak and spread to countries outside China, WHO declared the outbreak a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' (PHEIC) on 30th January 2020, and on the 11th March, the COVID-19 outbreak was characterized as a pandemic. By the end of March 2020, community transmission had been established in 98 countries outside China.

The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health confirmed the first coronavirus disease (COVID-19) case in Ogun State, Nigeria on the 27th February 2020. The index case was a 44-year-old foreigner who arrived through the Murtala Muhammed International Airport, Lagos on 24th February 2020 and proceeded to neighbouring Ogun state for business. This incident marked the beginning of transmission in Nigeria and highlighted the need for a strategy for containment, commencing with contact tracing.

Lockdown

The year 2020 National lockdown as a strategy to contain, control and mitigate the spread of the corona virus, came with an Address seen in the National Broadcast by late Muhammadu Buhari, President of The Federal Republic of Nigeria on the cumulative Lockdown Order of Lagos and Ogun States as well as the Federal Capital Territory on Covid-19 Pandemic at the State House, Abuja, on Monday, 27th April, 2020. The selected extracts here from the speech of the president's here resonates the entire background, reasons and

actions and the eventual backlashes from the political leadership actions and inactions evident in reports from state and non-state actors. Though not chronological from the original speech, they are outlined thus:

1. Fellow Nigerians

2. I will start by commending you all for the resilience and patriotism that you have shown in our collective fight against the biggest health challenge of our generation.

3. As at yesterday, 26th April 2020, some 3 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been recorded globally with about 900,000 recoveries. Unfortunately, some 200,000 people have passed away as a result of this pandemic.

4. The health systems and economies of many nations continue to struggle as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

5. Nigeria continues to adapt to these new global realities on a daily basis. Today, I will present the facts as they are and explain our plans for the coming months fully aware that some key variables and assumptions may change in the coming days or weeks.

6. Exactly two weeks ago, there were 323 confirmed cases in 20 states and the Federal Capital Territory.

7. As at this morning, Nigeria had recorded 1,273 cases across 32 States and the FCT. Unfortunately, this includes 40 deaths.

8. I am using this opportunity to express our deepest condolences to the families of all Nigerians that have lost their loved ones as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is our collective loss and we share your grief.

9. Initial models predicted that Nigeria will record an estimated 2,000 confirmed cases in the first month after the index case.

10. This means that despite the increase in the number of confirmed cases recorded in the past two weeks, the measures we have put in place thus far have yielded positive outcomes against the projections.

EndSARS Social Movement

It is generally assumed that tyrannies persist because they possess a monopoly on the use of force. Yet oppressed populations using nonviolent tactics – such as strikes, boycotts, and mass protest – are often the most powerful drivers of their own liberation (Ackerman,

2021). This brings to the fore the year 2020 emergence of Nigeria's mass protest tagged, end police brutality by its special unit, Special Anti-Robbery Squad (EndSARs). Agbashi et. al (2022) corroborate that this 2020 mass protest became the turning point and rebirth of organized activism in Nigeria especially coming from the push factor of the fallouts of the global covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, this popular Nigeria's civil resistance campaign against police brutality, extortion and extra-judicial killings in the year 2020 known as #EndSARS was registered as unprecedented in the 1999 post-military rule era and democratic history.

Asogwa, et al. (2021) aptly observed that between 2017 and 2020, there were mass protests against police brutality and impunity in Nigeria. Amnesty International notes that there is abundant evidence of police torture of civilians, denying people arrested by the police access to the justice system, the partiality of the judges when administering justice, the inability of the police to address the complaints of the arrested and extrajudicial killings. Worse still, the relevant authorities have refused to investigate and bring to book the police officers who perpetrate these crimes 'against the people (Amnesty International, 2020 cited in Asogwa et.al 2021s).

The police also profile and dehumanize ordinary citizens who they see as criminals simply because they belong to certain groups (e.g., musicians, footballers and those in possession of modern gadgets like phones and cars) (Amuta, 2020 cited in Asogwa et. al 2021). Amid these atrocities, there has been a public outcry against the excesses of police on social media, and by 2017, there was an online protest where about 28 million individuals from home and in the diaspora tweeted with the hashtag #ENDSARS to demand the disbanding of the unit of the police known as Special Anti-Robbery Squads (SARS), which is notorious for its brutality against the people.

Asogwa et.al (2021) attempts a corollary of the EndSARS protest contextualized within the deteriorating material conditions of life in Nigeria owing to how the government responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. They assert that Nigeria confirmed its first positive case of Covid- 19 in February 2020 and responded to the global lockdown, which started from Abuja, without adequate social provisions. This resonates the age long lack of adequate and credible data entrenched in established social registers and social security emanating from national planning in Nigeria.

Relatedly, there was an announcement of palliatives, but it was characterized by outright lopsidedness and deliberate mismanagement such that most of the vulnerable people

were shortchanged (Eranga, 2020 cited in Asogwa et. al 2021). It is not difficult to imagine the negative impacts of ill treatment on the people, given that the Nigerian economy thrives in the informal sector. By the time the news filtered that the SARS had brutalized an individual in Ughelli, Delta State, people began to unleash their anger on the police on social media. As the protest started, many other young Nigerians, especially those from the tech-oriented community, musicians, and other celebrities, shared their own ugly, lamentable experiences from SARS on Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media platforms. The rest is history.

Authentic Leadership

The authentic leadership theory is one of the newer emerging constructs in response to ethical and moral deficiencies in leaders i.e. Political leaders in global and local scale. George (2003:12) succinctly observed that:

Authentic leaders genuinely desire to serve others through their leadership. They are more interested in empowering the people they lead to make a difference than they are in power, money or prestige for themselves. They are guided by qualities of the heart, by passion and compassion as they are by qualities of the mind

Luthans and Avolio (2003) further posit that authentic leadership is a process that draws from both psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self development. This depth of robustness becomes the attraction of this theory to this study as Guba and Lincoln (1994) cited in Komives and Dugan (2011) suggested that knowledge is socially constructed, inherently subjective complex and nonlinear, and influenced by social systems (e.g., economic, political). Adding that the use of these emergent epistemologies in leadership research and theory building contribute significantly to contemporary theories by allowing for exploration of more diverse range of perspectives, such as deconstructing essentialist notions of power and position and examining non-hierarchical and non-linear process orientations. In more specific terms, Avolio et al. (2009) states that, there are four factors that cover the components of authentic leadership:

- i. Objectively analysing relevant data to make a decision;
- ii. Internalized moral perspective to regulate one's own behaviour based on internal moral standards;

- iii. relational transparency;
- iv. Openly sharing information and feelings to present an authentic self and self-awareness based on the understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses. George (2003:18) further corroborates this further explaining that authentic leaders are expected to demonstrate five qualities:
 - a. understanding their purpose
 - b. practicing solid values
 - c. leading with heart
 - d. establishing connected relationships and
 - e. demonstrating self-discipline

Political Leadership and Governance

According to Olowu and Sako (2002) cited in Cloete (2003), governance within the context of political leadership styles operates within a system of values, policies and institution by which a society manages its economic, political and social affairs through interactions within and among the state, civil society and private sector. They argue that it is on this basis of style of governance that political leaders are judged as good or bad. Put differently, the management of public crisis and emergencies. Hyden and Braton (1993); Cloete 2003) further exposit four criteria suggested to assess governance and invariably political leadership styles in a society which is quite relevant in this study. They are:

- a. Degree of trust in government
- b. Degree of responsiveness in the relationship between government and civil society
- c. Government degree of accountability to its voters
- d. Nature of the authority that the government exercise over its society

It is within these elements Cloete (2000) posits that the synergy of political leadership styles and good governance are inevitable as democratic governments are under obligation to apply the most appropriate developmental policy objectives towards society. Herein, the degree of trust in government is selected to interrogate the covid-19 pandemic management in global and Nigeria context by the political leadership. This is examined within the authentic leadership theory applied here to governance.

Discussion and Findings

This discussion section follows and examines each research question raised and juxtaposed with selected speeches of the president (political leader) during the management of covid-19 pandemic as a public crisis in Nigeria.

1. What were the features of the National lockdown strategy adopted by the regime/government of late President Muhammadu Buhari in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria and to what extent was it necessary?

The national public address (speeches) at different times from the outbreak of the global corona virus can be referred to as ‘citizen reassurances. That is obviously the first response that aligns with elements within the basket of good governance – accountability, transparency and responsiveness which all rest on the superstructure of public trust. The extract from late president Muhammadu Buhari public on 30th March 2020 are thus:

- a. Fellow Nigerians,
- b. From the first signs that Coronavirus, or COVID-19 was turning into an epidemic and was officially declared a world-wide emergency, the Federal Government started planning preventive, containment and curative measures in the event the disease hits Nigeria.
- c. The whole instruments of government are now mobilized to confront what has now become both a health emergency and an economic crisis.
- d. Nigeria, unfortunately, confirmed its first case on 27th February 2020. Since then, we have seen the number of confirmed cases rise slowly.
- e. By the morning of March 29th, 2020, the total confirmed cases within Nigeria had risen to ninety-seven. (Punch Newspaper, 2020)

The opening remarks, referring to citizens as ‘fellow Nigerians’ suggest the leadership empathy and condescension towards equality with ‘citizens’ and political leaders. The second and third statements connote elements of responsiveness and proactive measures to contain and mitigate the spread of the corona virus amongst the local populace. While the fourth and fifth statements reigns in on accountability for further action. This was demonstrated in the establishment of the National COVID-19 Pandemic Multi-Sectoral Response Plan coordinated and spearheaded by the presidency and the National Centre for Disease and Control in the second quarter of 2020. This came handy given the subsisting public and civil service structures and systems as well as robust technocrats, bureaucrats and the political will perceivably carried by the Nigerian political leaders across different strata.

The next strategy arising from the policy intention to contain the COVID-19 pandemic was the National lockdown. This was stated in the public address (speeches) thus:

- a. We are therefore working to ensure such interstate and intercity movements are restricted to prevent further spread.
- b. Based on the advice of the Federal Ministry of Health and the NCDC, I am directing the cessation of all movements in Lagos and the FCT for an initial period of 14 days with effect from 11pm on Monday, 30th March 2020. This restriction will also apply to Ogun State due to its close proximity to Lagos and the high traffic between the two States.
- c. All citizens in these areas are to stay in their homes. Travel to or from other states should be postponed. All businesses and offices within these locations should be fully closed during this period.

These three parts of late president Muhammadu Buhari's speech initiated and enforced the national lockdown in Nigeria as occasioned by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

This was characterized by restricted interstate and intercity movement of persons starting with the Federal Capital Abuja and the commercial hub Lagos, where almost all financial operations are domiciled and headquartered and likewise industries of all sorts followed the lockdown trajectory. In addition, there was the closure of education institutions, businesses mostly with physical contact, and even the public sector workers were directed to work from home except few higher-level officers, medical and security services personnel. In comparison to global experiences this was similar across most climes in all continents of the world. The difference and dividing line were the political leadership (in)actions and sincerity of purpose predicated in the prevailing political, social, economic and cultural arrangements in local communities and societies.

Expectedly, the president's speech gave assurances to citizens contrived with 'good' policy intentions:

Fellow Nigerians, for the past four weeks, most parts of our country have been under either Federal Government or State Government lockdown. As I mentioned earlier, these steps were necessary and overall, have contributed to slowing down the spread of COVID-19 in our country...

In my last address, I mentioned that Federal Government will develop strategies and policies that will protect lives while preserving livelihoods.

In contrast, Nwanegbo-Ben & Ozoigbo (2021) aptly stated that, the government through its weapon of propaganda about the high fatality rate of the disease created unwarranted fear among Nigerians and its lock down policy led to so many hardships including starvation, avoidable deaths as a result of lack of access to health facilities, ugly sharp practices, primitive and unorthodox preventive and curative measures, domestic violence and law enforcement agencies brutalities on innocent and defenseless citizens etc.

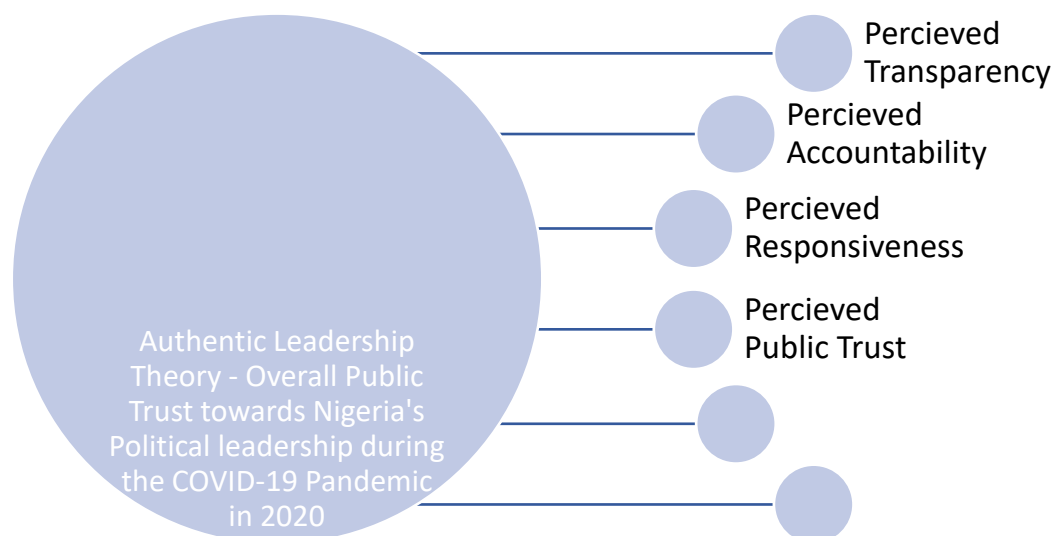
Cuadrado (2022) corroborates that at global scale that between 2020 and October 2022, there was a wave of Covid corruption related incidents across service delivery; health financing; governance and leadership; medical products, vaccines, and technologies; health management information systems; and human resources. Cuadrado, further points out that worldwide trends included different forms of petty corruption at the point of service delivery, procurement corruption, embezzlement and mismanagement of funds, state capture, the expansion of black markets and proliferation of substandard and falsified medicines, data manipulation and misuse, and corruption in health workforce governance, recruitment, and management.

He adds, that this invariably led to several economic, political, and social drivers that enabled corruption to infiltrate and compromise governments' responses to Covid-19. While these existed across the world, they placed a heavier burden on the already-strained health systems in developing countries. Hence for Nigeria, the extent of the Federal Government of Nigeria's management of this National lockdown is the crux of the matter. The aftermath seemed to follow the old path of failures and broken promises. The evidence aligning with this assertion are further discussed within the second research question thus:

Can the authentic leadership theory provide the reasons why the political leader's statements (speeches) fall short of the policy actions (palliatives, socio-economic programs) during the COVID-19 National lockdown and thereafter in post COVID-19?

Though this will remain a debate from different dimensions and for further future research agenda, it is still necessary to examine the authentic leadership theory within the paradigm of late president Muhammadu Buhari selected speeches in the management of the covid-19 pandemic and the outcomes evident from available literatures. Figure 1 reflects the framework underlining the governance ingredient with portrayed gaps which newer ideas and governance arrangements can fulfil with time to come.

Fig.1



Source: Authors (2025) Adapted from Beshi & Kaur (2020)

As earlier stated, Avolio et al. (2009:60) outlines the four factors that cover the components of authentic leadership:

- i. Objectively analyzing relevant data to make a decision;
- ii. Internalized moral perspective to regulate one's own behavior based on internal moral standards;
- iii. relational transparency;
- iv. Openly sharing information and feelings to present an authentic self and self-awareness based on the understanding of one's strengths and weaknesses.

While, George (2003:18) corroborates this further explaining that authentic leaders are expected to demonstrate five qualities:

- a. understanding their purpose
- b. practicing solid values
- c. leading with heart
- d. establishing connected relationships and
- e. demonstrating self-discipline
- f. Although we have adopted strategies used globally, our implementation programs have been tailored to reflect our local realities. Following this, the selected speech of late President Buhari in 2020 were interrogated thus:

- ✓ In Nigeria, we are taking a two-step approach.
- ✓ First, to protect the lives of our fellow Nigerians and residents living here and second, to preserve the livelihoods of workers and business owners to ensure their families get through this very difficult time in dignity and with hope and peace of mind.
- ✓ To date, we have introduced healthcare measures, border security, fiscal and monetary policies in our response. We shall continue to do so as the situation unfolds.
- ✓ Some of these measures will surely cause major inconveniences to many citizens. But these are sacrifices we should all be willing and ready to make for the greater good of our country.
- ✓ In Nigeria's fight against COVID-19, there is no such thing as an overreaction or an under-reaction. It is all about the right reaction by the right agencies and trained experts.

The good intentions to protect lives of Nigerian citizens and preserve the livelihood of workers and business owners was countered by the absence of credible data and other times manipulated and politized data as observed by Cuadrado, D.C., (2022) and Nwanegbo-Ben & Ozoigbo (2021) summarized thus:

Governments manipulating data on Covid-19 infections and death rates created a mismatch between reality and official accounts in several countries, including Brazil, India, Nigeria (my emphasis) the Philippines, Tanzania, Zambia, and Venezuela.

Specifically, in Nigeria the desire for profit from foreign donors motivated the consideration for welfare package for the people. The intent is not really for the people but for the enrichment of some selfish political leaders. The federal government of Nigeria announced the provision of palliative for the lockdown experienced between March 2020 and July 2020. Billions of naira was released from public and private donations to be given as cash and food to the citizens. The monies did not circulate as was announced and food and beverages meant for the citizens were stored in warehouses all over the country by some political leaders without distribution. The intention for not distributing them maybe to sell them privately. There are video evidences on social media showing warehouses where undistributed food items were looted by the masses nationwide. Obviously, the uproar about COVID-19 in Nigeria and claimed or perceived government assistance was not for altruistic reason or the benevolence of those in power (see the presidential speech, 2020) but was due to selfishness and personal aggrandizement (Channels TV. 2020 cited in Nwanegbo-Ben & Ozoigbo 2021).

At this juncture, the last research question is necessary to conclude this paper within its focus with public trust and political leadership. It states thus:

Was the EndSAR mass protest the outcome of the (mis)management of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in Nigeria and was it avoidable?

As highlighted earlier, Asogwa et.al (2021) attempts a corollary of the EndSARS protest contextualized within the deteriorating material conditions of life in Nigeria owing to how the government responded to the Covid-19 pandemic. They opined that Nigeria confirmed its first positive case of Covid- 19 in February 2020 and responded to the global lockdown, which started from Abuja, without adequate social provisions. This resonates the age long lack of adequate and credible data entrenched in established social registers and social security within a ‘water tight’ system and emanating from adequate national planning devoid of the Nigeria ‘politics. This is contrasted with the president’s selected speech below:

1. The distribution and expansion of palliatives which I directed in my earlier broadcast is still on-going in a transparent manner. I am mindful of the seeming frustration being faced by expectant citizens. I urge all potential beneficiaries to exercise patience as we continue to fine tune our logistical and distribution processes working with the State Governments.
2. Our Security Agencies continue to rise to the challenge posed by this unusual situation. While we feel deeply concerned about isolated security incidents, I want to assure all Nigerians that your safety and security remain our primary concern especially in these difficult and uncertain times.

This put citizens in disappointed path as poverty levels exacerbated as evidenced in frustrations and transfer of aggression coming from the EndSARS mass protest and invariably massive looting of government warehouses purportedly in search of food and sustenance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

“Everything rises and falls with the leader”. The extent to which public crisis management is contemplated and addressed, has defined political leaders on whose table the ‘buck stops’. For developing societies as Nigeria amongst others, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 revealed much about the political leadership and followership (Biu, et.al 2025). This remains the core argument of this paper and requires newer directions for public trust reposed on political leaders in Nigeria. Put differently, the management of public crisis by political leaders in Nigeria across different strata (Federal, States and Local governments) many times

misses the 'mark' as value-driven leadership remains elusive in the face new set of competencies expected of political leaders in global and local context. To this end, the recommendations are the following:

1. The emergence of political leaders in Nigeria through democratic elections since the return of civilian regime in 1999 requires constitutional changes.
2. Strong men and weak institutions remain a minus in the political, economic and socio-cultural arrangements of Nigeria and only stronger laws can reign in on impunity of any ramification.
3. Independent investigations into the management of the COVID-19 pandemic funds and related matters of abuse of human rights by security agents and agencies is an urgent agenda to right the past wrongs.

The extent of abuses and corruptions surrounding the management of the COVID-19 by the Nigeria political leadership in many ramifications is aptly captured in this poem extract thus:

Nigerians love names: 'His Excellency',
'Honorable senator', 'Aso Rock', 'Lockdown',
'Lockup', 'Palliatives', 'face masks'
'Sani-tizers', 'Isolation', 'Self-isolation', 'Quarantine.'
The index case, brief base, court case,
'PPE', 'OPP', 'Out of Point', 'Copy and paste'
COVID_NIGERIA, 'Big brother Nigeria', COVID_NIGERIA,
Nigerians say; 'Na bliss', 'Na blessing', 'Na Big business.'
Brothers outsmart brothers, Sisters outsmart sisters,
Rich outsmarts poor, Poor outsmart poor,
Leaders outsmart people, People outsmart leaders,
People outsmart people, Doctors outsmart patients,
Businesses outsmart customers, Patients outsmart doctors,
Figures outsmart figures, COVID_NIGERIA, (Biu, 2020).

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