

The Politics of Covid-19 Pandemic and Human Security threat in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria

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Abstract - *The study examined the politics of the Covid-19 Pandemic and human security threat in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. Politics as social activity involve how matters are resolved through the collective decision. The ability to contain the spread of the Covid-19 brought spotlights on leadership capacity, the awkwardness of state actors, global ideological differences, and policy priorities of various international, regional and national governments. Globally, Covid-19 led to an adverse impact on human security, such as the closure of schools, jobs, restriction of movement, among others. In Port Harcourt city, the enforcement and fight against the pandemic were pursued with aggressiveness by the Rivers State government. The lockdown enforcement led to constitutional conflict between the federal government and Rivers state governments. To achieve this aim, the study adopted the triangulation method of data gathering techniques. A total of 250 structured questionnaires were randomly administered among the respondents in Port Harcourt City, out of which 230 were retrieved and used for analysis. The paper adopted fear appeal theory as its theoretical construct. The study unraveled that the lockdown policy adversely impacted human security. The study recommends amongst others that the Rivers State government and Nigeria at large should improve on food security.*

Keywords - *lockdown, human security, politics.*

INTRODUCTION

Politics is exciting because citizens and nations disagree over solemn issues, such as: how they should live or "who should get what, how and when" (Lasswell, 1936, p. 13). They also contend over how power and scarce resources should be distributed in society. Politics as a social activity also involve how matters are resolved, how such collective decision is made, or whose word should count. Indeed, the politics of coronavirus known as the Covid-19 pandemic has been controversial based on the devastating effect and the spread that has threatened human existence globally like no other pandemic in recent time. The ability to contain the spread of the Covid-19 brought spotlights on leadership capacity, the awkwardness of state actors, global ideological difference, and policy priorities of various international, regional and national governments. Globally, Covid-19 led to an adverse impact on human security, such as the closure of schools, jobs, restriction of movement, among others. Since the cure to the pandemic was unbeknown, most countries adopted lockdown as a major strategy to contain the spread of the Covid-19. The politics of Covid-19 adversely impacted governance in

most democratic societies. It manifested in both allocation of scarce values and excessive use of state powers during enforcement of lockdown policies. The rule of laws was flagrantly violated and abuse globally. It was perceived by some scholars that the fight against the Covid-19 is unconventional warfare, and drastic measures must be put in place to check the spread through enforcement of total lockdown. At the global level, the pandemic resurrected ideological power differences between the world powers that existed during the Cold War era. The Covid-19 pandemic origin was traced to Wuhan city, China. A school of thought believed that it was a Chinese biological weapon to gain global prominence and re-establish bipolarise.

Nevertheless, the Chinese government used its relationship with the World Health Organization to advance its diplomatic interest. Despite the fact that the Chinese government tried to contain the spread of the pandemic within her territory, which was constantly countered by the US media, the Chinese government used pandemic diplomacy to enhance her influence and improve her international image, thereby contending the US dominant status in the global health care provider and role model. Cabestan (2020) noted that:

The COVID-19 crisis has also highlighted how much the world had become dependent upon China's medical and pharmaceutical products, leading, in particular, the US and its allies, if not to fully decouple, at least to reduce their dependence upon this country. More generally, rather than mitigating the economic and geostrategic competition between China and the United States, this unprecedented planet-wide health crisis has intensified the "new Cold War" between the two great powers. While it has hurt the US's prestige, it is far from having demonstrated China's ability to lead (p.2).

At the local levels, the politics of the Covid-19 pandemic were predicated on the fact that most countries, particularly the developing nations, were gripped by the moral panic occasioned by the devastating effect of the pandemic. Second, considering the fact that effective control of the pandemic requires huge funds and a functional health sector, most developing nations were already looking for vertical/horizontal aid. This is premised on the fact that most countries, particularly developing nations such as Nigeria, whose health sector is staggering and underdeveloped, employed various



measures such as setting up of Covid-19 Pandemic Committee, strengthening the capacity of Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, the introduction of lockdown in some states, restriction of movements of persons and goods on land, air, and sea, among others to contain the spread of Covid -19. The Nigerian government demanded assistance from individuals, organizations, and nations. Donations were made in both materials and finance. However, the politics of disbursement became a burning issue. Etekpe (2009, p.5) asserts that politics is "the official capacity of a state to exercise control or authority over men and resources in a given territory mainly for the disadvantage of the people and owners of the resources." David Easton viewed politics as "the authoritative allocation of values for the society" (Easton, 1953, p.128). This manifested in the Rivers State governor's condemnation of the benevolence associated with the 10 billion Naira received by the Lagos State government to fight the Covid-19 pandemic while abandoning other states, particularly Rivers State, that produces a greater percentage of the nation's wealth (Ukpong, 2020). The allegation of misappropriation of Covid-19 funds soon emerged. While some argue that the pandemic was a channel for money laundering, Kogi State Governor Yahaya Bello made it clear that there is no case of Covid-19 in Kogi State (Premium Times, June 8th, 2020).

In Port Harcourt city, the enforcement and fight against pandemic was pursued with aggressiveness by the Rivers State government considering the fact that Port Harcourt is a commercial hub of multinational oil firms with both local and international airports and seaport. Port Harcourt City was shut down on May 4th, 2020. The enforcement of lockdown policy led to a constitutional conflict over jurisdiction between the federal government and Rivers state government, and political party acrimony between All Progressives Congress-led federal government and the People's Democratic Party-led Rivers State government resurfaced. The Editorial Board (2020) noted that:

One of the fallouts of Coronavirus and the associated lockdown in most states is the intimation of federalism. Many states have gone their independent path on strategy, process, and procedure of handling the matter in the face of failure by the federal government to define a path. It resulted in memorable clashes between the federal and state governments that provide the opportunity further to test the extent and limitations of Nigeria's federalism... Wike, in his capacity as Governor, shut down the boundaries of Rivers State and facilities within it. They included the sea and airports, as well as entry routes to the state. On April 7, Caverton Helicopters, a logistics services company, flew ten persons into the Air Force Base in Port Harcourt against the restriction and without clearance from the state government. Wike ordered their arrest and drove down to lock the offices of the service

provider at the Air Force Base. The Rivers State Commissioner of Police backed the state governor.

The geographical position of Port Harcourt city makes her more vulnerable than other cities in Nigeria. The degree of mobility in the state was relatively high. To facilitate containment of the pandemic, the enforcement adversely impacted human security. There was the closure of schools, markets, restriction of movements, and closure of business, among others. Therefore, the study is aimed at interrogating the politics of coronavirus, enforcement of lockdown, and its implication on human security.

Politics, Coronavirus (Covid 19) Pandemic, and Human Security Impact

The concept of politics has been essentially contested among scholars, politicians, technocrats, among others. At one extreme, many assert that politics is an essential characteristic of political life, which is predicted or found in relationships. While others assumed that politics can only occur at the levels of government and the state and must involve party competition. Several scholars have defined politics from various perspectives summed up in the context of the style of politicking, such as 'ability to control' 'rent-seeking' 'self-seeking' or 'allocate resources.'

Politics is the practice of the art and science of directing and administrating states or other political units. Historically, the word 'polities' originated from polis, which denotes literally 'City-State' according to Aristotle. The ancient Greek civilization was divided into groups of independent city-states, and each of these states-controlled its system of government. The largest and most influential among these states was Athens; it was described as the 'cradle of democratic societies' by Aristotle. From the public affairs perspective, Aristotle declared that "man is by nature a political animal." Aristotle argues that it is only one in the political community of human beings can enjoy a good life. He further argues that politics is an ethical activity concerned with creating a 'just society,' hence called politics the "master science." He concluded that politics is about the policy of the state

David Easton (1953) defined politics as an "authoritative allocation of values." Easton argues that the government is always quick to respond to the pressure of the larger society, particularly in the allocation of rewards, benefits, or penalties. The authoritative values are those accepted in society. It is the authoritative decision that facilitates the plans of the action for the community.

Sodaro (2008, p.31) buttressed that politics is a "process by which people pursue collective goals and deal with conflicts authoritatively using the government." The import of the above assertion is a continual sequence of events and interactions among individuals, groups, and government. The definition of Sodaro is anchored on the political interactions that happen with a structure of rules,

procedures, and the institution rather than haphazardly. Here, the people represent an all-encompassing term that involves individuals and different groups and organizations. It pays attention to collective activities.

From the authoritative perspective, Almond, Powell, Strom, and Dalton (2004, p.2) refer to politics "as the use of these authoritative and coercive means—who gets to employ them and for what purpose." Furthermore, they refer to politics as "activities associated with the control of public decisions among a given people and in a given territory, where this control may be backed up by authoritative and coercive means" (Almond et al., 2004, p.2). The supreme task of the political authority is to create and sustain a legal environment characterized by liberty, tolerance, mutual respect by citizens or groups of citizens for one another, and general acceptance of the 'bindingness of contractual obligations. Leftwich (2004, p.26) argues that politics is an:

Activity through which people make, preserve, and amend the general rules under which they live. As such, it is an essentially social activity, linked, on the one hand, to the existence of diversity and conflict and, on the other, to a willingness to cooperate and act collectively. Politics is better seen as a search for conflict resolution than as its achievement, as not all conflicts are, or can be, resolved.

Politics is viewed as the exercise of power over the subject from the state perspective. That is, controlling the political administration of the state. The exercise also requires intolerance to defaulters. This exercise of state power was employed to tackle COVID 19. The emergence of Coronavirus and its devastating effects became a challenge to many sovereign state governments, and they are alien. Various measures and strategies were employed to tackle the pandemic using state powers, such as the imposition of lockdown to reduce the spread of the virus. The United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2020) revealed that coronavirus is huge of a family of viruses that found among human and different species of animals such as bats, cattle, cats, camels, among others. Although, rarely for animals infected, coronavirus can be transferred to humans and then spread between people such as SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV, and name virus called 'SARS-CoV-2' (CDC, 2020). The CDC further disclosed that "all three of these viruses have their origins in bats...this is the first pandemic known to be caused by the emergence of a new coronavirus. In the past century, there have been four pandemics caused by the emergence of novel influenza viruses" (CDC, 2020). However, the process employed in enforcing the lockdown in most urban cities, particularly in the third countries, adversely impacted human security.

The adverse impact of COVID 19 on human security is immeasurable, particularly when the death toll soared and the entire global system, businesses, schools, churches,

among others, were shut down. Humans suffered from structural violence. Human security is people-centered security. A kind of security that is associated with human freedom. The state protects its citizens from health threats. The concept of Human Security was popularized in 1994 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The purpose was to broaden security along several dimensions such as economic security, food security, environment security, health security, personal security, community security, among others.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted fear appeal theory as its theoretical construct. The fear appeal theory is traced to the 'use of communication-persuasion models' (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley, 1953; McGuire, 1980). The fear appeals are predicated upon fears. Merriam-Webster (2002) defined fear as "an unpleasant emotional state characterized by anticipation of pain or great distress and accompanied by heightened autonomic activity especially involving the nervous system...the state or habit of feeling agitation or dismay...something that is the object of apprehension or alarm"(cited in Williams, 2012). Fear is grown as a device to guard humans against life-threatening conditions. As such, "nothing is more important than survival, and the evolutionary primacy of the brains fear circuitry" (Williams, 2012, p.2). Williams further pointed out that "fear appeals could be direct or indirect. The direct fear appeal is predicated on the welfare of the message receiver. The indirect fears are based on motivating persons to assist others in danger. Abernethy and Wicks (1998) pointed out three dimensions, which can enhance the success of fear appeals. They include (1) design ads that motivate changes in individual behavior, (2) distribute the ads to the appropriate target audience, and (3) use a continual communication effort to bring about desired change. Furthermore, Leventhal (1970) and Rogers (1983) unraveled that fear- emanating from messages can be active when "(1) the message is credible as it warns that if the current behavior continues, the probability of negative health consequences is high, and (2) the warning also provides the person an effective method of changing behavior that guarantees protection from the predicted aversive health outcome" (Hankin, Firestone, Sloan, Ager, Goodman, Sokol, and Martier, 1993, p.1 1).

Linking the theory to the paper is predicated on the fact that the adverse impact of the Covid Pandemic on humans created fears in society. Many suffered psychologically, physically, spiritually, among others, from the negative propaganda. For instance, the news on a number of those who recovered or survived from the pandemic was played down. The propaganda was tailored in such a way that the vulnerable public believed that nobody survived the pandemic; hence, the government or other institutions exploited these opportunities in creating fears, which led to a violation of fundamental rights of persons and communities via the imposition of lockdown, destruction of goods and commodities of the perceived defaulters,

restriction of movements, among others in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study population covers Port Harcourt City, which includes Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt local government areas, Rivers State, Nigeria. A total of 250 structured questionnaires were randomly administered among the respondents, out of which 230 were retrieved and used for

analysis. Ninety-four percent of the total questionnaires were retrieved, which represents the reliability of the study. The questionnaire and interview are focused on obtaining the perceptions and opinions of different people on the effects of lockdown on human security in Port Harcourt City, Rivers State. Twenty- Five respondents were interviewed through an unstructured interview. For security reasons, all the names and particulars of the interviewee are anonymous. The questionnaire's graphic method of data presentation is shown below:

Tablet: Questionnaire Distribution

Selected areas in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria	Issued Questionnaire	Returned Questionnaire	Percentage
Port Harcourt City Local Government Area			
Diobu	100	92	40
Elekahia	50	43	19
Obio/Akpor Local Government Area			
Choba	50	49	21
Rumuomasi	50	46	20
Total	250	230	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020 Profile of the respondents

Based on this, the demographic data were presented and analyzed. The details of the academic research population are genuine and qualified, which shows that the respondents are knowledgeable to ensure validity and reliability, as well as the objectivity of the overall research result, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Questionnaire Distribution

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Six	34	15
WAEC/SSCE/Equiv.	89	39
NCE/OND/Equiv	46	20
BSc/BA/HND	40	17
MSc/MA/Equiv	17	7
PhD	-	-
Others	4	2
Total	230	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Similarly, twenty persons comprised of elders and youths were interviewed. They include eight elderly men and twelve youths who are residents of Port Harcourt City, Rivers State. Though, some of the interviewed pleaded to be anonymous. All the interviewees were selected through random sampling.

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The table below indicates the response generated from the ninth question on the questionnaire that sought the perception of the respondents on the impact of lockdown on human security in Port Harcourt City. The responses indicated as follows: 23% sudden economic and financial downturns, 26% poverty, 12% increase in crime rate, 39% education. Based on the responses, the lockdown adversely impacted human security in Port Haircut City, Nigeria, as indicated in the table below.

S/N	Impact of lockdown on human security in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria	Frequency	Percentage
1	Sudden economic and financial downturns	57	25
2	Food Security	88	38
3	Education	85	37
Total		230	100

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Discussion of Findings

The lockdown emerged without preparation in Port Harcourt City. The lockdown led to sudden economic and financial downturns among the urban dwellers. The sudden change and state policy towards containment of the virus led to panic buying; hence, sellers increased the cost of items in the markets. This development adversely impacted many households, and their income came under pressure because of the artificial increase in the price of commodities. Ayoade (2020) observed that "a loaf of bread which is for the common man, formerly sold between 300-350 Naira is now sold for 400-450 Naira. A basket of tomatoes that was sold for 500-600 Naira before the coronavirus pandemic now ranges between 1,700 and 1,800 Naira. Likewise, a kilo of meat increased in cost from 1000 to 1,500 Naira on average. A bag of pure water sachet that is essential in every home doubled in price from N100 Naira to N150 to N200." Our investigation revealed that lockdown adversely impacted food security. The markets were shut down, and there was the restriction of movement of persons and lorries that convey food items into Port Harcourt City. Greater percentages of the food items consumed in Port Harcourt are externally conveyed to the state, especially from the northern part of the country. For instance, the Rivers State government arrested 14 persons hidden in two trailers conveying cattle from Adamawa State to Port Harcourt. The 14 persons were prosecuted by the Mobile Court constituted by the administration under the Executive Order 6 signed for the declaration of the lockdown. From our findings, the presence of the mobile court did not deter the residents in Port Harcourt from violating the lockdown protocols. The residents devised a means of operating illegal markets at

midnight and undisclosed parts of the city, particularly those at the Port Harcourt suburb, to avoid destruction of their commodities by the state government Convid-19 Task Force. The continuous lockdown led to an increase in the crime rate in Port Harcourt City. Residents witness petty theft such as snatching of handsets, stealing of foodstuffs, among others. The schools were shut down, except privilege few that attend private schools where zoom was used in teaching and assignments.

Concluding Remarks

The study has shown the politics of Covid-19 pandemic lockdown enforcement adversely impacted human security in Port Harcourt City, Nigeria. This includes the closure of schools, jobs, markets, restriction of movement, among others. The politics of Covid-19 adversely impacted governance in most democratic societies. It manifested in both allocation of scarce values and excessive use of state powers during enforcement of lockdown policies. Globally, the inability to contain the spread of the Covid 19 brought spotlights on leadership capacity, the awkwardness of state actors, global ideological difference, and policy priorities of various international, regional and national governments. At the local levels, the politics of the Covid-19 pandemic were predicated on the fact that most countries, particularly the developing countries, were gripped by the moral panic occasioned by the devastating effect of the pandemic. In Port Harcourt city, Nigeria, the enforcement and fight against pandemic was pursued with aggressiveness by the Rivers State government considering the fact that Port Harcourt is a commercial hub of multinational oil firms with both local and international airports and seaport. The lockdown enforcement led to a

constitutional conflict over jurisdiction between the federal government and Rivers state government. In light of the above, the following recommendations are put forward:

- The Rivers State government and Nigeria at large should improve on food security. Thus, the state should not continue to depend on other states for food supply. The state invests in agriculture, especially in food crops.
- The federal government and state improve the health sector by providing needed equipment necessary for public service delivery.
- The Nigerian state should enforce a true federal system of government that allows the state to handle some aspect of security that is domiciled in the Exclusive List. This is to avoid unnecessary constitutional conflicts among the federating units.

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