

COVID-19 and Good Governance in Nigeria: Lessons from Europe and Asia

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Abstract: The COVID-19 Pandemic has continued to have, in its trail, seismic effects which cut across all stratum and sectors of human endeavor across the globe. While many studies have emerged in the medical and scientific fields regarding the causes, effects and nature of the coronavirus disease, studies aimed at understanding and unraveling the political, social and economic factors, impacts and trajectories of the disease are still unclear and gradually emerging. Therefore, this study has the aim of generally contributing to the debate and the findings on the socio-political and economic causes, impacts and effects of the virus across geographical spaces and within political delineations. Specifically, the available data on the spread and morbidity of COVID-19 across the different regions and states presents a myriad of picture which are in need of interpretation. Importantly this study shall examine the question of whether good governance had effect on the containment and the spread of COVID-19 as well as the rate of morbidity in Europe and Asia and the lessons Nigeria can learn from it.

I. INTRODUCTION

It is noteworthy that the gradual emergence of China, India [in addition to the East Asian industrialized economies [apart from Japan] had largely contributed to the obsolescence of the 'Fukuyaman' thesis of *The End of History* (Fukuyama, 1990). Indeed, the thesis had been constructed to interpret the ascendancy and dominance of the capitalist west led by the United States and Western Europe over the defunct communist Soviet Union, thereby leading to the emergence of a unipolar world.

However, as it shall be later shown in the course of the study, the last thirty years since the collapse of the walls of Berlin had seen the industrial power and clout move from the West to the East. This shift of manufacturing power and industrial dexterity would have significant effect on the ability and preparedness of states to battle COVID 19. Indeed the image of crates of protective masks being snatched on airport tarmacs due to competition between United States and European Union countries, as reported by the *New York Times* (Bradly, 2020), in order to acquire china-made personal protective medical equipment, among other things, had shown that the world had moved from the upbeat-fukuyaman-unipolar triumphalism to a humbling bipolarity dominated by power centres of United States and Europe on one side and China and Asia on the other side.

This study falls under the political-economy of COVID 19 and as Herrera et al (2020) have noted, this area has been poorly researched. In term of specifics, the majority of the

studies on the political economy of COVID 19 had largely been concerned with the debates on the policy trade-offs between health versus economy (Alvarez et al, 2020; Eichenbaum et al, 2020; Farboodi et al, 2020; Herrera et al, 2020), the clash between politics and scientific expertise (Gonsalves and Yamey, 2020; Rutlege, 2020; Ezeibe et al, 2020), political capacity, state response and preparedness and COVID 19 outcomes (Mellish et al, 2020; Woo, 2020; Hartley, 2021; Capano et al, 2020; Ciqi, 2020; Alex, Yuda and Hogdou, 2020; Xu et al, 2020; Stocker, Jennings and Gaskel, 2020). However, these studies had either glossed over the place of good governance in combating COVID-19 or have emphasized on the role played by variables like the political system, policy styles, authoritarianism or populist intrusions into scientific domain in explaining the effect of the disease on the human body, body politics and the national economies. Specifically, there is gap in scholarship on the role played by governance generally and good governance in both the management and the ongoing outcomes of the pandemic. The central research question here is that beyond the medical and scientific cure and interventions, can the role of good governance impact in reducing the spread, morbidity and mortality rate of COVID-19?

Therefore, in order to achieve the research objective, the study adopted the postmodernist research philosophy, the inductive research approach, the case study research strategy, the use of secondary sources mono-method, a cross-sectional time horizon which targeted the period of COVID-19 pandemic from 2019 up to March 2021 and the research method of genealogy. Genealogy as research method is justified through its critical stance on the relationship between knowledge production and the agenda of power.

Genealogy largely owes its origins and methods to Nietzsche in the 19th century and Foucault in the 20th century. For Nietzsche, any idea or construct in existence is subjected continually to reinterpretation, transformation and redirection to a new purpose by a superior power (2007). Consequently, the organic world is said to be made up of overpowering, dominating and which in turn consists of reinterpretation, adjustment and along the way, previous meaning and purpose of a construct must necessarily be obscured or totally obliterated (Nietzsche, 2007:51).

The stance taken by this study is that 'good governance' as a construct is not a neutral or innocuous term. Instead it is a

term which have its own ideological baggage and which shall be unraveled in this section.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF ‘GOOD-GOVERNANCE’ AND COVID-19

Any clarification of what constitutes good-governance necessitates the unpacking of ‘governance’ itself as a construct. Nag(2018) submit that governance is the consequence of the sociopolitical forms of governing and irrespective of the different meanings ascribed to the term, there is a coalescence around the notion that it is a governing style which blurs the rigid demarcation between public and private sectors. Bryant(2018), noted that governance is different from government even though government can be part of the process. As such, it is conceived of as a many stakeholders process.

It is noteworthy that a central theme deducible from the definitions of governance in literature is that they all tend to emphasize limited role of government and multistakeholderism in the process. For instance, Keping (2018) submit that that governance is based on the recognition of the capacity for the implementation without a reliance on the power of government. Stoker(1999), commented further that instead of reliance solely on the authority and power of government, public affairs management can be achieved with the deployment of other management tools and procedures while limiting the government’s responsibility to using these tools to guide public affairs. Furthermore, Merrien(1999), also saw the limited role of the government in governance with the postulation that the main emphasis of governance is on “contracting rather than supervision”, on decentralization rather than centralization, inadministration by the state rather than redistribution by the state; on management based market principles rather than management via administrative departments, on cooperation between the state and private sector rather than being guided by the state. In other words, governance is a term conceived to further the ideological project of deregulation, limited government, the market as the final arbiter in the allocation of resources and the rejection of redistribution.

Furthermore, of the seemingly neutralizing terms, governance becomes a neo-liberal ideological project in the management of public affairs. Indeed, Keping (2018) noted that the four features of governance are process and not rules and stand-alone activity; coordination and not control; public and private sector partnership; on-going interaction and not formal institution. Consequently, what is being described here is a shape shifting leviathan that rejects control (and also accountability?) and regulation by the state. This leviathan is nothing but the neo-liberal economic agenda. According to Petrella (2016:31), neo-liberalism is an unstable process that is aimed at the re-deployment and fortification of the state for the purpose of securing highly regulated markets that facilitates the upward distribution (and not downward

distribution) of wealth and power and downward shifting of social suffering.

Stemming from the above, the ‘notion’ of governance cannot be separated from the neo-liberal consensus. It has been claimed that the incapability, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of government to deliver the renewed public goods of the society had led to the resurgence of governance in the social science (Mathur, 2008:2). However, as this study will later show, the high mortality rate and rapid spread of the coronavirus disease in locales that could be described as bastions of ‘good governance’ had falsified the original claim that ineffectiveness and inefficiency of government led to the relevance and the currency of the concept of ‘good governance’ in the first place. The question here is how did the concept of ‘good governance’ enter the social science discourse in the first place?

In Oelgomuller’s(2017) explanation of the doctrine formation process of the neoliberal consensus is made. According to the study, doctrine formation of the neoliberal consensus is the conversion of the political character of democracy and this conversion is based upon the assumption of making evidence based judgment that is free of ideologically oriented sentiments and characteristics by the particular economic rationality. Thus in the context of the present study, governance generally and good governance in particular, as constructs, presents the façade of being ideologically free and has the property of particular economic rationality that takes debate off the agenda. Furthermore, this is reinforced by the overlapping meanings of good governance conceived by the World Bank on one hand and the western liberal governments on the other hand. These meanings are based on the following assumptions: that where the World Bank views good governance in narrow and pure administrative and managerial terms, the western governments conceive it in broader political terms that is based on the adoption competitive democratic politics and the connection between democracy and development (Nag, 2008:128).

Accordingly, the key argument here is that governance and good government are products of the doctrine formation process embedded within the policy documents of the international donor agencies and the good practices adopted by various successful liberal democracies of the world and the aid recipient governments (Nag, 2018:129).

Therefore the effect previous paragraphs is the weaning of the governance and the good governance discourse from political sterility, innocuousness and neutrality and hence reveal the ideological underpinnings. Correspondingly it is worth reiterating here again that good governance is inextricable from the doctrine formation process of the neoliberal consensus and which has as its object, the foreclosure of politics, debate and the hollowing out of democracy. What is more? The above is carried out under the auspices of advancement of ‘ideologically free’ construct which are characterized by particular rationality. For instance, in the

case of a seemingly innocuous and commonsensical notion like the ‘rule of law’, Oelgomuller(2017) argued that the concept is one the ordering devices of the neoliberal consensus as it instrumentalizes the law as a formal, proliferated, complexities and broadened legalism in which the primary focus is one process rather than substance in the name of *government as management* [emphasis placed by this writer].

Consequent upon the exposure of the intellectual project behind the concept of good governance and its ideological leanings, the next section shall attempt a comparative analysis of the experience and situation of COVID 19 in the selected countries in Asia and in Europe.

III. COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SELECTED COUNTRIES IN ASIA AND EUROPE: MAPPING THE PRESENT

Genealogy, as an intellectual project postulates that history is always a history of the present and that there are no universal truth claims but only egimes of truth. Hence achieving the historical accounting for the present necessitates firstly, the mapping of that present condition. It is noteworthy that COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out in phases in different parts of the world and this may bring about the gradual end of

the pandemic. However, the caveat made by the World Health Organization that safe and effective vaccines, though will be a game changer, are still unguaranteed, suggest that the world is not yet out of the woods. Therefore, this brings back the need to examine the state of the pandemic in the countries under review.

Table 1.1 Pandemic statistical situation in the selected countries in Asia and Europe as at 15th March 2021

S/n	Country	Number of cases	Recovered	Deaths	Total Population of the Country
1	China	90,034	85,214	4,636	1,444,216,107
2	India	11.4 million	11 million	159,000	1,389,456,822
3	Vietnam	2,554	2088	35	97,956,157
4	United Kingdom	4.26 million	-	126,000	68,134,973
5	Italy	4.07 million	2.59 million	102,000	60,367,477
6	Germany	2.58 million	2.37 million	73,463	83,971,144

Source: www.worldometer.info accessed 15th March 2021

There is need to put the figures produced above in clearer perspective and this is achieved in the table below:

Table 1.2 Total COVID 19 cases and mortality in the selected countries

s/n	Country	Total Population	% of Global Population	Mortality Aggregate	% of Global Mortality	Total number of Cases	% of Global Cases
1	Asia[China, India, Vietnam]	2.9 billion	36.7 %	163,671	6%	11,492,588	9.5 %
2	Europe[U.K, Italy, Germany]	212 million	7.2 %	301,463	11%	10,910, 000	9 %

Source: www.worldometer.info accessed 15th March 2021. The percentages are computed from Table 1.1 above and they are based on the global case of COVID 19[120,553,130] and global number of deaths due to COVID 19[2,667,255] as published on www. Worldometer.info

The table above shows that the three countries in Asia have an aggregate of 36.7 percent of the global population and also contribute 6 percent of the global COVID-19 mortality and 9.5 percent of the global cases of COVID 19 as at 15th March 2021. This is in contrast to Europe’s selected countries who represented 7.2 percent of the global population [and one-fifth the three Asian countries’ combined population] and yet contributed a whopping 11 percent of global cases and with COVID-19 mortality rate at par with the combined Asia’s selected countries’ of 9 percent.

Stemming from above, there is no doubt that COVID-19 had not only spread rapidly in the selected countries of Europe, given their comparatively smaller population, but had also killed more in Europe than in Asia? Therefore, the question remains what accounted for this present state of affairs? Provision of answers to this question shall involve the use of genealogy to unravel the history of the handling of the pandemic in the areas of the selected countries under review.

IV. GENEALOGY OF THE HANDLING OF THE PANDEMIC IN THE SELECTED COUNTRIES

The previous section has achieved the mapping of the present in the handling of COVID 19 in the selected countries and regions. This has led to the conclusion that Covid-19, had killed more and affected more people in selected European countries than in the Asian cases, thus leads to the handling to covid-19 in the countries under review.

Several studies have emerged in the handling of the covid-19 at the reported origin of the corona virus, China. These studies include Yu et al (2020), Alex Yuda and Hongdon (2020), Ciqi (2020), Capano et al (2020), Kavanagh and Singh (2020), Lipsy(2020) among others. The dominant theme which runs across these studies is largely that authoritarian and autocratic political systems largely handled the responses to Covid -19 better and more effectively than the liberal democratic political systems. Specifically, majority of studies demonstrated support for the Chinese policy style and model as the minimum behavior of what constitute proper response in a period of emergency or crises. These policy tool –set include breach of privacy for contact tracing, speedy lock downs and quarantine as well as full health insurance coverage for all population. Consequently, this intellectual stance could largely explain the eruption of ‘political

capacity' literature aimed at explaining the handling of Covid-19 in different countries. Some of the political capacity literature include Fisunmogh and Rooney (2020), Karanaugh and Singh (2020), Woo (2020), Hartley (2021) among others. The central thesis of these can be represented in the table below:

Table 1.3: Political Institutions and Ideologies which shape the Handling of Covid according to relevant literature between China and other countries.

China/Vietnam	Other Countries
Authoritarian political system/ Command and Control	Competitive and deliberative democracy
State led capitalism	Private sector led capitalism
Full employment and industrialization	De-industrialization in several sectors and structural unemployment
Universal social services	Emergency Keynesianism
Full regulation and supervision of economy by the bureaucratic states	Limited government and de- regulation

The table above shows the political institutions and ideologies which constitute governance as gleaned from the studies cited in the previous paragraph in this section. Therefore, if the above institutions and ideologies are the case, it can be argued that they largely affected the pandemic outcomes in the two regions under review. However, the above account is yet to unravel the history of present handling of Covid-19 pandemic in the countries under review.

Undoubtedly, the cure for a disease is a question to be answered by the natural sciences. However, the handling of a pandemic involves political choices which are shaped by the available political institutions, ideologies and administration technologies. Furthermore, the political choices which shape or determine the pandemic had been further conditioned by the previous politico-economic choices made prior to the pandemic.

It is tempting to explain the Chinese and Vietnamese better handling of the pandemic with authoritarian political system and explain 'next door' India's poor showing with the failure of democracy. However, this explanation is at best triumphalist and at worst superficial. It appears that the Chinese success in the handling of the pandemic can be linked to the peculiar state-led industrialization which began during the days of Deng Xiaoping.

Several studies have examined the Chinese model of political-economy and need delay this present study (Wilson, 1989; Beesun and Islam, 2005; Lim, 2013; Cao, 1995). However, it is worth stating that the Chinese pragmatic political choice largely stood in contradiction to the western model of market-led privatization, deregulation, openness and competitive democracy. Indeed, Cao (1995) noted that the political choice of China involved a carefully orchestrated sequences aimed to create a two-track economic system which consists of parallel state and non-state sectors. This political

choice was largely as a result of Deng Xiaoping's philosophy which he articulated in 1982 as follows:

Both in revolution and in construction, we should also learn from foreign countries and draw on their experiences but mechanical application of foreign experience and copying models will get us nowhere. We must integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete realities of China, blaze a path of our own and build a socialism with Chinese characteristics – that is the basic conclusion we have reached after reviewing our long history(Deng, 1982)

Later in 1989, Deng Xiaoping would later reinforce the views articulated above by linking the excessive Chinese population to the need to pursue a socialistic path with a distinctive Chinese characteristic. However, the question remains, what is the distinctive Chinese characteristics of the socialist path?

Studies like Cim (2013) and Cao (1995) tend to view the Chinese characteristics as the existence of the parallel market-driven non-state sector alongside with the state-sector. However, a reading of the Deng's 'cut and mace' philosophy shows that the Chinese characteristic are more than state-market parallelism. Indeed, Deng noted that when talking about fighting battles, comrade Liu Bocheng often use this Schuan popular saying: "it does not matter if its yellow cat or a black cat, as long as it catches a mouse" (Deng, 1989). This orientation largely showed that 'Chinese characteristics' goes beyond the state-market parallelism, thesis and is more of a grand-strategy approach towards dominating both the home front and the international political economy. Indeed, one cannot but agree with the view that the very success of the Chinese models poses serious challenge to the conventional notion that the only effective reform package is the one offered by "shock therapy" school (Cao, 1995:6). The shock therapy school was the view championed by the Bretton woods financial institutions, international donor agencies and liberal western governments. It was largely applied to transitional economies in Eastern Europe, Africa and Latin America and it involves direct entry into market economy via the total privatization of the state sector, deregulation, free market and competitive democracy. It is worth reiterating here that embedded within the shock therapy package is the Western notion of good governance which have been discussed earlier in this study.

Drawing from above, it is hereby argued that the Chinese model of good governance as espoused in the socialism with Chinese characteristics' stands as viable alternative to the western conception of good governance' and also explained in large part both the handling of and outcomes of Covid-19 in the countries under review. Indeed, China stood in direct contrast to India and European countries under review in the outcome of covid-19. For instance, majority of the Chinese cases of covid-19 occurred in the province of Hubei which housed the city of Wuhan where the pandemic was first

reported. As a result of this, China was able to seal off the province of Hubei from the rest of the country while also removing the province leadership (Ciqi; 2020).

The soul-searching on the failure of the western handling of the COVID-19 is still ongoing. However, such inquiry had largely narrowed down western response to unpreparedness. For example, Mellish et al (2020) made inquiry on the reasons behind the United Kingdom and United States' lack of preparation for the COVID 19 pandemic. Stocker et al (2020) submitted that in the case of the United Kingdom, the governance system lacked capacity and therefore called for the need for reforms. However, these studies failed to capture the reality on ground which is that COVID-19 handling failure in the west is not about lack of capacity inherent in the dominant governance system but the failure of an ideology, an ideology which had for a long time convinced the majority of the world that there is no alternative to it.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has set out to examine the question of whether good governance had effect on the containment and the spread of COVID-19 as well as the rate of morbidity in Europe and Asia. This is informed by the gap in existing scholarship on the response to COVID-19 on the role played by governance generally and good governance in both the management and the ongoing outcomes of the pandemic. The central research question here is that beyond the medical and scientific cure and interventions, can good governance play impact in reducing the spread, morbidity and mortality rate of COVID-19 and other future pandemics?

Therefore, in order to achieve its research objective, the study adopted the postmodernist research philosophy, the inductive research approach, the case study research strategy, the use of secondary sources mono-method, a cross-sectional time horizon which targeted the period of COVID-19 pandemic from 2019 up to March 2021 and the research method of genealogy. Genealogy as research method is justified through its critical stance on the relationship between knowledge production and the agenda of power.

Consequently, the study had been able to establish that there are two rival views of good governance and the COVID-19 pandemic had been able to reveal the poverty of the dominant view and the efficacy of the alternative. The dominant view of good governance, though appear neutral, innocuous and self-evident and thus removing the need for debate or politics, has ideological commitment of being wedded to the neoliberal political and economic ideology. However, the alternative model, largely espoused by the Chinese state and which largely flows from the ideas and reform efforts of the Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping is an eclectic approach that is not based on the state-market parallelism but involves a grand-strategy to dominate both the domestic politico-economic reality and the international political economy unobtrusively. Formerly, the dominant or western conception of good governance has held sway in many in the social sciences and

dominated not only the west but also many aid-recipient countries in the third world under the Thatcherian slogan of 'there is no alternative'.

It appears that COVID-19 pandemic had not only revealed the brittleness of the western conception of good governance but also its ideological poverty in the time of crises or emergency. Specifically, the neoliberal market led ideology has largely proved ineffective but had failed disastrously and the large scale loss of lives attests to this. Notwithstanding this failure, one must but agree with Filho, that in spite of the claims of the neoliberal ideologues and experts to the contrary, the strong hand [and not an invisible hand] of the state that had been the organizing force of the 'neoliberal assault on all political obstacles to the profitability of capital accumulation' (2020, para.8)

In the final analysis the real lesson of the Asian handling of and response to COVID-19 through the Chinese case study [and to a large extent the Vietnamese] is not about the adoption authoritarian political approach in governance. It is about the grand-strategy of dominating the domestic and international space through the use of home grown political and economic strategy that places paramountcy on the meshing of domestic reality and strengths with foreign knowledge, experience and reality all in a continuous historical and existential flux. In the final analysis, this study supports the view on the state response to COVID 19 that 'strong infrastructure and "stability" are clearly not sufficient. The state in all its capacity must be mobilized through the political processes (Kavanagh and Singh, 2020:5).

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