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## State Fragility and Covid-19 pandemic: Implications on the political economy of Nigeria

C.G. Chidume<sup>a,\*</sup>, C.N. Oko-Otu<sup>b</sup>, G.C. Aro<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of History & Strategic Studies, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State, Nigeria<sup>b</sup> Department of History & War Studies, Nigeria Defence Academy (NDA), Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria<sup>c</sup> Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has seriously impacted negatively on the socio-economic and political activities in the international system. The pandemic has exposed the leadership capacities and health investments cum preparedness of countries across the globe. This paper studies the reactions and responses of nations in containing the deadly virus and observes that while Western nations react rapidly and more proactively, African nations seem to be caught in a web of religious prevarications and State fragility which has impugned on the efforts of States in containing the virus. The paper argues that the Nigerian government's response so far in containing the virus is indicative of State fragility and that the prevailing perception of the virus as eschatological and nihilistic among the citizens, especially the very religious ones, may further obfuscate and mar government's efforts in containing the virus. The paper will show how the government's approach engenders a dire socioeconomic complication which may have more disastrous effects on the political economy of post Covid-19 Nigeria and suggested ways forward.

## 1. Introduction

Global pandemics like world wars pose a number of threats to the survival of the human race; this is as a result of elements of contagion and spillover arising from the growing interaction and interconnection between States in the international system made possible by the use of information communication technology. The outbreak of the corona virus in Wuhan, China in late November 2019 was a turning point in the international system in terms of its bilateral economic and political implications. The inability to curtail the movement of people, particularly, non-Chinese citizens, who had contracted the virus to other parts of the world, was a major factor in the internationalization of the deadly virus. Because of its rapid spread and massive fatality across the globe, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) a global pandemic. Presently, about 135 of the 145 countries in the world have recorded cases of the corona virus with variations in the number of deaths.

It is important to note that since the outbreak of the global pandemic, different countries have responded differently in the attempt to contain the spread of the virus. In China, containment efforts have involved quarantines and widespread restrictions on labor mobility and travel,

resulting in unplanned delays in restarting factories after the Lunar New Year holiday and sharp cutbacks in many service sector activities (Interim Economic Ass, 2020a, p. 1) Subsequent outbreaks in other countries, including South Korea, USA, Spain, UK, Nigeria, Egypt, Italy etc., have also prompted containment measures such as social distancing, self and family isolation, use of medical facilities, quarantines and border closures, albeit on a smaller scale. Western nations seem to be rapid, proactive and sympathetic in their response, promising stimulus funding for individuals and businesses and social intervention funds. Contrarily, African nations including Nigeria are trapped in a web of religious prevarications and State fragility which has impugned on the efforts of States in containing the virus. Nigerians and particularly the very religious ones see the outbreak of the virus from the perspective of the religious end time doctrine.

Consequently, the government of Nigeria has taken a cue from other countries in closing national borders, shutting airports to local and international flights, limiting internal movement of persons particularly in affected States and distributing relief items to indigent citizens in affected areas. Granted, supportive macroeconomic policies can help to restore confidence and aid the recovery of demand as virus outbreaks ease, but cannot offset the immediate disruptions that result from

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [chudidume@yahoo.com](mailto:chudidume@yahoo.com) (C.G. Chidume).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2021.100127>

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enforced shutdowns and travel restrictions (Interim Economic Ass, 2020b) in a fragile State. The adverse consequences of these developments on the citizens and businesses may be more catastrophic in the coming days. The argument of this paper flows from the fact that the Nigerian government has broken her social contract with the citizens-vast majority of who have been suffering deprivation of social security from the government. The broken social contract has shifted the loyalty of a good number of the citizens to their religious leaders. There is also a tendency of noncompliance to the total shutdown since the government does not have adequate emergency response mechanism to cater for her citizens particularly those in underserved rural areas where the total shutdown are being enforced, should the virus escalate to these regions. Against this background, forced compliance without adequate supply of basic needs may trigger youth restiveness, hunger, starvation among other humanitarian crises and vices, while noncompliance may increase the risk of spreading the virus and further hamper government's efforts at containment. Whatever be the case, this paper is set to show how the multiplier effect will be felt in the post Covid-19 political economy of Nigeria.

To begin, this paper shall give a background of the Covid-19 virus in Nigeria, examine the dynamics of government's response, conceptualize State fragility in the context of Nigeria and thereafter, provide an explanatory synopsis of its implications on the political economy of post Covid-19 Nigeria.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Scholars have applied various contending theories subjecting the contemporary States to intense analyses. The contention has been pitted between the liberal and the Marxist theorists. The fragile State conception akin to the developing nations has further necessitated the theoretical expositions on the State. Poverty questions, structural violence, misgovernance, political economy and underdevelopment are key issues that could not be addressed by some States, which have given them the labeling and epithets of fragile States system. This study, which is set to discuss the fragile State of Nigeria and the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic and its implication on the political economy requires an apt theoretical expositions. In view of this, the study adopted the post-colonial State theory.

The study adopted the post-colonial State as an abstraction and derivative from the Marxist theory of the State. The post colonial State theory advocates the body of knowledge, which is basically concerned with taking stock of the political, economic, social and historical effects and circumstances on the developing nations as a result of the European colonialism and imperialism in the 18<sup>th</sup> cutting through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is used to refer to the study of the attempt to transform, and otherwise of the previous colonized territories in the context of the dynamics of imperial conditions, Ashcroft et al. (Ashcroft et al., 1989, pp. 11–13) argued that postcolonial theory emerged “from the inability of European theory” to deal effectively with the challenges. and the varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing. This thought rejigged the neo-Marxists and dependency scholars to strengthen the debate of the post-colonial State perspective and buttressed the negation of the consequences of colonialism and imperialism on the developing nations.

It is imperative to trace the inception of the post-colonial State conception in order to ensure its validity. In this perspective, Bhabha advocates that postcolonial analysis came from colonial experiences. He argues:

Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, and peoples. (Bhabha, 1994)

The theory has been further given critical expositions by the contemporary Marxian theoreticians (epigones) such as Alavi (Alavi, 1973), Ake (Ake, 1985), Ihonvbere (Ihonvbere, 1999), Ibeanu (Ibeanu, 2003). The post-colonial State tries to illuminate succinctly how the serving ruling class in the post-colonial State like Nigeria has slowed down the pace of the development of the political economy, and this has dovetailed in their inability to urgently manage the COVID-19 emergence in the country. The several challenges which have led to the slow pace of development prior to COVID-19 were exemplified by Imoh, Luke and Roger in these statements:

The contemporary development plight of Nigeria at post oil economy and resurgent local crisis from Boko Haram terrorism in the northeast, cattle rustling, Fulani herdsmen and rural violence in the north central, the Shiite sectarian crisis in the northwest, the resurgent clamor for self-determination by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in about four decades after the Nigeria/Biafra civil war (1967–1970), the re-emergence of militant groups such as the Niger Delta notably the Niger Delta Avengers, and the Red Egbesu Water Lions at post amnesty to the Niger Delta militants in 2005 etc, are among the novel trends in contemporary post-colonial Nigeria. Although since independence in 1960 a number of thorny issues remain contestable such as the ethnic minority question, inequitable revenue allocation formula, asymmetrical state structure, lack of true federalism, inability to evolve exact census figures, ethno-religious crisis, public corruption etc. In particular, the fears of the ethnic minority groups resulted in setting up of the Willink's Minority Commission in 1958. However, most of these challenges re-emerge in everyday lives of Nigerians as threats to corporate existence of Nigeria. All these point to discernible complexities and contradictions of the post-colonial Nigeria in five decades of political independence and almost two decades of nascent democracy. (Imoh et al., 2016)

The above scenario has created developmental hitches since the political independence in 1960. The ruling class has styled the leadership based on the ethnic contradiction and consideration, and this behaviour has led to the misgovernance of the post colonial State in Nigeria. The hues and cries today in Nigeria attest to the failure of development. The current protests rocking the country confirms the fact the country is in the orgy leadership problem. These problems are substantiated in the basic assumption of the post colonial State theory.

The theory is hinged on the assumption that the political class of the modern State is inexorably creating quite a lot of means to perpetuate their exploitation of the economic situation of the country. This is exemplified in the management and distribution of the palliatives measures of the federal government under the lockdown conundrum.

One outstanding index of the post-colonial State as expounded by Ake (Ake, 1985) is that the State has limited autonomy. Thus, the post-colonial State is also formed in a way that it caters and indeed enhances the egocentric individual interests; the advantage of the rapacious political class. This proclivity undermines the up-scaling and out-scaling of democratic tenets in Nigeria. As Jakuboski (Jakuboski, 1973) previously noted that the “political class are having the political and economic dominant positions and continuously taking the advantage of clamping down and exploiting the down trodden.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the State does not symbolize the universal interest but the meticulous concern of the dominant ruling class. The political economy of Nigeria as preyed upon by the political class in the era of Corona Virus popularly known as COVID-19 has given rise to the mismanagement of the economy. Presently, revenue from crude oil, which is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, has dwindled, due to poor sales in the international circles, yet the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Accountant General have shared huge sum of money to non-existent persons and some States were not involved in the distribution of the Federal Government palliatives. Currently, the lockdown is being eased across the federation without taking the appropriate

measures to care for the loss the citizens encountered under the prevailing acute economic situation orchestrated by the lockdown. To justify the uncaring nature of the present Nigerian State, the universities across the federation have been locked down as a result of the industrial action embarked upon by the academic staff, and the government does nothing about it, but resorted to orchestrating structural victimization on the lecturers by non-payment of their salaries for four months spanning July–October, 2020. At the moment, the future of the universities remains bleak even after the lockdown. It is important to note that there is high level of extra-judicial killing under the lockdown policy today in Nigeria, which expressly qualifies the country as fragile state.

Accordingly, Ake (Ake, 1985) submits that “in the periphery of capitalism factors which have to do with the altitude of growth of productive forces induce the Nigerian State, all the way through a number of political institutions and apparatuses, a clear vehicle of primitive accumulation for the dominant class or its corollaries”. Basically, the theory of postcolonial State sees the State as an instrument of primitive accumulation by the governing class and their associates (Alavi, 1973).

### 3. Background to the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), corona viruses are a family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SAR) and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)(World Health Organization, 2020). The name Coronavirus was derived from the Latin word *corona* meaning crown or halo (Martin, 2020). The virus is named “corona” primarily because of the crown-like appearance of the virus under a solar. Since the outbreak of the virus in 2019 in the Wuhan province of China, there have been definitional mismatch and theorizations on the origin of the virus. Some are of the view that the corona virus was manufactured by the Chinese scientists as a biological warfare agent in an attempt to gain ascendancy over the US in the struggle for global hegemony. However, scientists allege that the corona virus originated from animals and specifically bats and is transmitted from animals to man. The virus spreads through droplets released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. A person can become infected with coronavirus by being in close proximity (within 2 m) of an infected person (Techlyblog, 2020). Infection can also spread by touching a surface that an infected person coughed or sneezed on (Techlyblog, 2020). Signs and symptoms of the disease include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection could cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome and sometimes death.

The rapid spread of the virus across the globe and the increasing number of deaths recorded among infected persons led to the declaration of the covid-19 as a global pandemic. Since the declaration of the COVID-19 outbreak on 31 December, 2019, a total of 191, 127 cases, including 7, 807 deaths (case fatality ratio 4.1%), were reported globally, as at 18 March, 2020 (Covid-19 Guidance for Sch, 2020, p. 1). As of 18 March, 2020, 161 countries/territories/areas and one international conveyance have reported laboratory confirmed COVID-19 cases (World Health Organization, 2019), with China, Italy and the United States being the hardest hit. The first confirmed case of the covid-19 pandemic was reported in Nigeria on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 (Nigeria Center for Disease, 2020, p. 2) when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus. With this, the government began tracing all those who have had contact with the Italian and on 9 March, one of the contacts from Ewekoro, Ogun State tested positive to the virus. With increased returnees from affected countries to Nigeria the number of infected persons continued to increase which compelled the Nigerian Government to close its international borders and airports/seaports, and declared a stoppage of all academic, religious, political and social activities in order to enable the tracing and containment of the virus. However, between 27<sup>th</sup> March and 9 April 2020, the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) had reported total confirmed cases of 276, with 44 persons discharged and death record of 6 persons (“Update on Covid-19”, 2020).

Remarkably, the fatality rate of the infection in Nigeria is remarkably low compared to other countries in the West and Eastern parts of the globe. For instance, while the virus was decimating Italians in their homeland, the Italian migrant who brought the virus to Nigeria has fully recovered and discharged. Notwithstanding, the Nigerian Government did not consider the internal political, economic and social dynamics alongside other unique environmental factors in adopting the Western approach to the containment of the deadly coronavirus. Based on the prevailing socio-economic and political deficiencies and limitations of the Nigerian environment marked by years of economic and social deprivations, Nigeria fits among fragile States. This paper forecasts the implications of the total lockdown of activities and the “stay at home campaign” to the political economy of post Covid-19 Nigeria. The crux argument of the paper is that the country may have to grapple with the multiplier effects of starvation, robbery, increased fatalities, malnutrition, insecurity, price increment, etc. as a consequence of government’s stay at home approach and failure to strategize a response mechanism given the above social conditions. The next section of this paper will be dedicated to analyzing the government’s approach in a fragile State.

### 4. State Fragility and the dialectics of Nigerian Governments’ response

The concept of fragile State is novel and suffers from definitional mismatch. Despite having recently entered the wider realm of development policy, ‘fragile State’ has established itself as a ubiquitous concept in the international discourse. The term is usually associated with a lack of will or capacity of the State to perform its core functions (Ines Afonso, 2015, p. 1). Fragile States are commonly described as incapable of assuring basic security, maintaining rule of law and justice, or providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens (Mcloughlin). As a result, there is a prevailing atmosphere of poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, insecurity, weak institutional frameworks among other negative functional indicators which retard economic growth and development. The Department for International Development in its working paper articulated that fragile States are remarkable for;

Weak State institutions that cannot manage the very real grievances caused by, for example, inequitable distribution of resources or unequal access to formal institutions. Essentially, this means that in fragile States political institutions are not strong enough to manage effectively the natural conflicts that occur in society. This ‘fragility’ or weakness will be most evident at any time that the State undergoes processes of economic, political and social change (Vallings and -Torres, 2005).

Though fragile States mean different things to different people, the conceptualization of the Fund for Peace (FFP) Fragile States Index is of particular interest to this paper. According to the FFP, fragile States are underscored by;

progressive economic decline of the society as a whole as measured by per capita income, Gross National Product, unemployment rates, inflation, productivity, debt, poverty levels, or business failures; high levels of corruption, profiteering, and marginalizing, persecuting, or otherwise excluding opposition groups; widespread abuse of legal, political and social rights, including those of individuals, groups and institutions (e.g. harassment of the press, politicization of the judiciary, internal use of military for political ends, repression of political opponents); structural inequality that is based on group (such as racial, ethnic, religious, or other identity group) or based on education, economic status, or region; increased security threats to a State, such as bombings, attacks and battle-related deaths, rebel movements, mutinies, coups, or terrorism; fragmentation of state institutions along ethnic, class, clan, racial or religious lines, as well as brinkmanship and gridlock between ruling elites; Human Flight and Brain Drain Indicators (Fund for Peace Fragile St, 2019)



Nigeria is home to over 200 million Africans, commentators and political analysts are quick to note that Nigeria has the capacity of leading other African countries in the march towards development and growth. Nigeria is perhaps the most naturally endowed country in Africa, in terms of its abundant mineral resources, agricultural and forest resources, distinctively more favorable climatic conditions and highly diverse human resources. If properly harnessed, Nigeria has the capacity and potentials to improve the standard of living of her citizens, attract foreign investors and sustain an all-time high economic growth and development. Olu observed and rightly so, that “Nigeria has maintained a remarkable growth over the last decade, recording an average growth rate of 6.8 percent from a large economic base and the potential for further growth is reasonably high. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth was estimated at 6.23 per cent in 2014 compared to 5.49 per cent in 2013” (Olu et al., 2016, p. 1). This shows that positive instances of economic growth and development are not alien to the Nigerian socio-political and economic environment.

However, since independence in 1960, the country has been trapped in an unfortunate political, economic and social quagmire which has denied the citizens an opportunity to maximize the full potential of their environment. The leadership of the country has failed to translate the country’s commonwealth into significant social and human development for her citizens. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) estimated the poverty incidence of Nigeria at 69 per cent in 2010, up from 54.4 per cent in 2004, using the Harmonized National Living Standard Survey (HNLSS) of 2009/10 (NBS, 2020). Ajakaiye is of the view that “the country’s performance is at odds with the general international trend of poverty reduction, in particular with other countries experiencing rapid economic growth” (Ajakaiye et al., 2014). In 2019, the President of the United States, Donald Trump described Nigeria as the poverty headquarters of the world as a result of the growing inequality in the wealth distribution of the country and corruption which has led to the impoverishment of an overwhelming majority of her citizens.

In more specific terms, the report of the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics revealed that “the level of unemployment increased from 23.9 percent in 2011 to 25 per cent in 2014, while the country’s human development index (HDI) value increased by only 8.1 per cent in the last decade from 0.466 in 2005 to 0.504 in 2013, positioning the country at 152 out of 187 countries.” (NBS, 2015) Available statistics also indicates that the country has a higher incidence of unemployment particularly for women than men, figures from the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) put the number of unemployed males around 7–8 million while the number of unemployed female population increased from 6.7 million in 2010 to over 10 million in 2014 (NBS, 2015). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) noted that “Nigeria’s HDI value for 2018 is 0.534 which put the country in the low human development category - positioning it at 158 out of 189 countries and territories. Between 2005 and 2018, Nigeria’s HDI value increased from 0.467 to 0.534, an increase of 14.34 percent. Between 1990 and 2018, Nigeria’s life expectancy at birth increased by 8.4 years, mean years of schooling increased by 1.2 years and expected years of schooling increased by 3.0 years” (Inequalities in Human Dev, 2019a, p. 4). When compared to the wealth of the nation, these figures expose the huge/massive negligence, deprivation and dearth of government investment in the development of human capacity in the country.

Furthermore, from the perspective of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) which identifies multiple overlapping deprivations suffered by individuals in three dimensions; health, education and standard of living, Nigeria’s performance seems to be in perpetual decline. In Nigeria, 51.4 percent of the population (102.8 million people) are multidimensionally poor while an additional 16.8 percent are classified as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (33.6 million people). The breadth of deprivation (intensity) in Nigeria, which is the average deprivation score experienced by people in multidimensional poverty, is 56.6 percent (Inequalities in Human Dev, 2019b). The implication of the increase in the multidimensional poverty index is that the vast majority of Nigerians

do not have access to quality health care facilities, education and that there is a general decline in the standard of living of the people. Political office holders prefer traveling abroad for medical attention to building standard medical facilities at home, they would rather send their children to oversea universities than invest in quality education and they would prefer to transfer their looted funds to foreign banks than investing the same in Nigeria to grow the local economy. Therefore, the increase in Multidimensional poverty in Nigeria is primarily responsible for increased illiteracy, poverty and disease in the country which are integers of a fragile State. The impact of this increase on the fight against the corona virus will be elucidated in the subsequent section of this paper.

Similarly, the cultural, religious, and social heterogeneity of Nigerians remains an agent of diversity rather than unity. Continued attempts at massaging the artificiality created by Great Britain into a unified entity have not yielded the anticipated political dividend (Aregbeshola, 2011a, p. 3). There is increasing agitation for self-government by different ethnic groups as a result of the inability of government to efficiently spread development thus, leading to inequality and marginalization of one group by another. Perceived neglect and economic marginalization have also fuelled resentment in the predominantly Muslim North, the militant Islamist group, Boko Haram, has grown increasingly active and deadly in its attacks against State and civilian targets, including the April 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok which attracted extensive international attention. Similar agitations in the southern part of the country has given rise to IPOB, MEND, Niger Delta Avengers, banditry, kidnapping among other security threats to the nation. The inability of the government to provide sufficient security for her citizens has given way to ethnic and regional security outfits and militias which are strong indicators of a fragile State. The implication of the upsurge in regional and ethnic security outfits is that government is no longer the only legitimate monopoly of force. As a consequence of a failed security mechanism, the use of the armed forces by the government to forcefully confront and destroy these regional security outfits have given rise to extrajudicial killings and this further erodes the trust and confidence of the people on the capacity of the government to protect the lives and properties of her citizens.

Moreover, corruption among public officials has weakened State institutions and further eroded accountability in the system. Evidently, a country with weak government institutions will undoubtedly be unable to satisfy the terms and conditions of the social contract theory. Oko-Otu and Ani noted that;

Institutional weaknesses make nation building difficult since it reduces the capacity of government to check the excesses of people in the society and creates a system of mediocrity and injustice. The weakness of security and safety institutions in Nigeria as a result of bribery and corruption seems to serve the interest of the political and rich class at the expense of the poor and suffering masses. As a result, people have lost faith in the institution of the State as it has failed to provide basis for safety, security and sound judgment favorable to all (Oko-Otu & Ani, 2018).

The capacity of public institutions to deliver optimal and satisfactory services to the people has been greatly retarded in Nigeria. Among security and safety institutions such as the Army, the Police, the Road Safety Corps, Civil Defense Corps and other paramilitary agencies, bribery and corruption has greatly incapacitated them and adversely reduced their capacity in carrying out their constitutional roles of protecting the sovereignty and territory, enforcement of laws, order and safety measures of the country. Compromise and bribery among Road Safety Corps officials and allied road security agencies have occasioned a prevarication and abuse of safety measures leading to insecurity in road transportation.

In 2017, Nigerians considered the Police and the Judiciary (judges and lawyers) the two most corrupt institutions in the State apparatus (Corruption in Nige, 2017). High levels of corruption within these

institutions mean that senior officials are rarely punished for corruption (Giljeet al., 2018). The use of the Army in internal security and their inability to contain the Boko Haram insurgency raises a fundamental question on the government's acclaimed investment in internal security of lives and property of citizens. Other public institutions of government are enmeshed in ethnic/religious bigotry, nepotism and corruption which has eroded meritocracy and enthroned mediocrity. In this state of affairs, the vast majorities of Nigerians are unemployed and/or cannot assess quality jobs because they are not the kith and kin of the well to do in the society. Worst still is the fact that public facilities like schools, hospitals, roads, electricity, water, etc. are not attended to as monies meant to invest in them are siphoned and embezzled by those in positions of authority. Therefore, when placed on the scale of fragile States, all indices and indicators of fragility are well evidenced in the Nigerian polity.

Consequently, in the wake of the rapid diffusion of the Covid-19, the World Health Organization (WHO) warned African countries to brace up and prepare for the worst as the continent with the highest number of fragile States. In the case of Nigeria, the growing multidimensional poverty index, with high level illiteracy, poor quality of education, decaying health sector, poor standard of living, dearth of or inadequate database and lack of widespread testing facilities, the entry of the virus into country would put majority of Nigerians at risk. On March 17, the Federal Government following the first reported case of the virus and conscious of the implications of further escalation announced the closure of all its international borders, total lockdown of social, political and economic activities within the country. This was to be enforced for two weeks to enable the authorities to trace and isolate those who have had contact with the Italian index patient of the virus. Subsequently, States within the country began to prohibit interState movements and went ahead to declare a total shutdown of all forms of economic and social activities within the country. This was followed by the closure of schools, offices churches, markets, among other places of social economic interactions and strict enforcement of the stay at home campaign.

As expected, the lockdown evoked serious humanitarian needs among vulnerable Nigerians. The Nigerian government simply copied the Western style of lockdown without taking into account the realities of the effective social support systems already in place in the West and without considering the unique environmental and climatic dynamics of Nigeria which has impact in the spread and control of the Covid-19. Although the government has announced a social support programme for the citizens to cushion the effects of the lockdown on the poor masses, such an attempt in Nigeria is usually marred by ethnic and regional sentiments and always seen as an opportunity to embezzle national funds. The indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has already alleged lopsidedness in the government's distribution of palliative materials to poor Nigerians. A statement credited to the IPOB reads that;

A critical analysis of the information on the database of the NCT office on the number of beneficiaries from the largesse on zone by zone basis reveals that Southeast is at the bottom of the table just after South-south whereas northern zones come top. This is provocative and a blatant confirmation that Nigeria has incurable hatred for Ndi Igbo (Akinsola, 2020).

The ethnicization or the regionalization of government social support funds in Nigeria undoubtedly fuels ethnic sentiments which are inimical to national integration. From this singular act, those who are politically excluded are logically permitted to boycott or disobey any instruction from the Federal Government as it relates to the stay at home campaign against the spread of the Covid-19. The lopsided nature of the distribution of the palliatives even, led to a segment of Nigeria's National Assembly lending its voice to the criticism of the Federal Government (Aluko, 2020). Even though the government has shown commitment in releasing funds to support indigent Nigerians amidst the lockdown, the bulk of the money are largely not accounted for, which further erodes

government's credibility before the people. On 9 march 2020, it was alleged that the sum of 2 trillion naira has been disbursed by the Federal Government to over 2.5 million Nigerians, however, amidst the alleged marginalization of some sections of the society, the records of the disbursement could not be made public, it was later alleged that the details of the beneficiaries were kept in the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation (OAGF) which was gutted by fire the previous day. In this regard, the sincerity and transparency of the government in dealing with the social and humanitarian needs of the people is therefore called to question. Since the lockdown by the Federal Government, different States have followed in shutting down inter-State movement and placing restrictions on all forms of social gathering.

Worthy of note in the containment measures of government is the reaction of the people to the closure of churches and other places of worship. Among most religious groups in Nigeria there is a sense of religious prevarication and eschatological interpretation of the outbreak of the Covid-19. To these classes of citizens, the corona virus outbreak will cause a fundamental revival towards Armageddon and cleanse the earth of man's iniquity. Others within this class argue that it is God's way of reasserting Himself as the ultimate Being worthy of human worship. This particular interpretation has prompted disobedience to the government sit at home directive. In Katsina State, Muslim faithfuls protested the close down of mosques and on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2020, just to placate the seething Muslim populace, the State government lifted the ban on Friday Jumaat prayers though not without some conditionalities. Christian bodies subsequently, temporarily backed by their State governments lifted the ban on Church services to celebrate Easter Sunday. This action by some State governments and religious groups in Nigeria smirk of hypocrisy and an indicator to a feeble commitment to the containment measures of the government. The inconsistency in governments' response amidst State fragility and paucity of requisite health care facilities for the containment of the coronavirus begs the question on the rationale behind initial government lockdown of activities. The exercise has also exposed the fact that the lockdown is not the only solution or the most effective approach to the containment of the coronavirus; it is not in the best interest of poor Nigerians with prevailing economic hardship and increasing multidimensional poverty index. Having explored the dynamics of governments' response and the various sides and interpretations to the lockdown, the next section shall explore the implications of the lockdown to the sociopolitical economy of post Covid-19 Nigeria.

## 5. Implications of governments' response to the political economy of post Covid-19 Nigeria

The political economy of a country is pivotal to its economic dynamics as well as its social system (Aregbeshola, 2011b, p. 1). Having established the validity of State fragility in Nigeria, the ensuing economic and political dynamics arising from government approach and response to the containment and management of the covid-19, will undoubtedly have immediate multiplier effect on the political economy of the country. Put differently, post Covid-19 political economy of Nigeria may be dotted with increased multidimensional poverty index among Nigerians, social and political vices, religious fundamentalism, etc. as a result of the prevailing government containment policy.

To begin with, Nigerian economy is heavily dependent on the oil sector which is her primary and main source of foreign exchange and a major financier of the national budget. However, the economy is currently undergoing a transition stage from a mono-economy to a diversified economy driven by agriculture and the service industry. Consequently, the national budget which is usually planned against oil revenue may suffer as a result of the decline in the price of oil and reduction in the quantity of barrels. The African union report noted that;

Nigeria has made its budget forecasts for the first quarter based on an assumption of the old price of a barrel at 67 US dollars. This price has

now dropped by more than 50% (OECD Development Centre, 2020). Estimates show that Angola and Nigeria could together lose up to \$65 billion in income. This will have the effect of reducing the foreign exchange reserves of these countries and their ability to implement their development programs with ease, and efforts to reduce poverty will take a hit. Moreover, these countries will need significant resources to fight the Covid-19 pandemic health and economic impact. As of March 4, about 70 percent of the April-loading cargoes of crude oil from Angola and Nigeria were still unsold (*Impact of the Coronavirus, 2020*).

Notwithstanding, continuous lockdown and closure of national borders will also stall governments' revenue generation in the short run, which implies that governments may be trapped in debt in order to meet up with the demands of governance. Given the present situation, it is estimated that;

Africa could lose up to 20–30% of its fiscal revenue, which is estimated at 500 billion in 2019. Governments will have no option than to rely on international markets which may increase countries debt levels. Debt should be used for productive investment or growth-enhancing investments rather than maintaining their spending plans. There is a high probability that many countries could face an implosion in the stock of external debt and servicing costs due to the increase in fiscal deficits as more emphasis will be put to fulfilling social needs including health care systems, socioeconomic stimulus to householders, SMEs and enterprises (*a Impact of the Corona Vi, 2020*).

Most African economies including Nigeria are highly dependent on import duty and tax revenues; the suspension of all forms of international trade to contain the spread of the virus implies that countries dependent on imported goods will witness inflation in the short run and recession in the medium and long run.

As a result of the stringent political control of the oil sector, agriculture is by far the largest employer of the labor force in Nigeria, employing over 60 percent of the total population and about 90 percent of the rural poor. (*Nchuchuwe, Adejuwon*) The total economic lockdown in the country will have immediate effect on food production which undoubtedly will fuel inflation leading to economic depression and increased devaluation of the Nigerian currency within the local markets and eventually in the international markets. Already the price of essential preventive health facilities such as the sanitizers, hand gloves, nose masks and other commodities have increased exponentially in the local markets because of increased demands and inadequate supply. Instructively, the period of the pandemic coincides with the period of clearing, cultivation and planting particularly in the rural areas where agricultural subsistence is the rule. The enforcement of the compulsory stay at home and lockdown all over Nigeria will deprive the farmers the opportunity of participating fully in this year's farming circle which implies that these rural communities will not produce required quantity of food for local subsistence. Hence, government distribution of food items without a commensurate policy to replenish them may culminate in famine in post covid-19 Nigeria. The implications of this are multifaceted and compounded by the deteriorating standard of living among Nigerians. On the immediate, while government may be able to control people's movement with the promise of palliative and stimulus measures, the incidence of hunger, starvation, malnutrition and death resulting from inadequate supply of food and other basic needs during and after the Covid-19 pandemic may further force the government to the precipice.

Similarly, the lockdown in the movement of persons and economic activities will adversely affect the service industry particularly those who depend on their daily effort for survival. The ban on some internal means of transportation (particularly motorcycles) and communication will increase economic hardship of those hitherto employed in these sectors and reinforce crime and other criminal acts in the community. The conjecture between fragility and individual quest for survival may derail citizens

into crimes such as kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, and banditry, vandalism of public facilities, terrorism and quest for self-actualization. Lockdown has immediate implications for individuals who live on a hand to mouth basis and their network of dependents. If people cannot eat they will not obey a lockdown nor is there any reason practical or moral for them to do so. This means that more people will go below the poverty line in post covid-19 Nigeria (*Broadbent, 2020*). Meanwhile, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom has warned that the idea of total lockdown is not ideal for countries with a large population. According to him "while Covid-19 accelerates very fast, it decelerates much more slower. This is especially concerning countries with large populations where stay-at-home order and other restrictions used in some high-income countries may not be practical." (*United Nations Department, 2020*) Many poor people, migrants and refugees live in overcrowded conditions with few resources and little access to health care, physical distancing is very difficult in such situations, so other public health measures must be put in place and protection extended for the most vulnerable. Going by the strict enforcement of the stay at home containment policy of government, there is a higher tendency that more deaths may result from hunger, starvation and malnutrition than from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, although the virus doesn't have age limitation, it has been scientifically established that fatality is higher among older people when compared to the young. When we lock down, we are making a choice we are saving the lives of some older people and causing the death of younger ones especially children who may die as a result of malnutrition, starvation and disease of poverty (*Broadbent*). This will invariably rob the country of emerging workforce that will drive economic development and labor services for industrial developments. However, on the immediate, the lockdown on industries and corporate organizations may lead to loss of capital which will force companies to downsize workforce and retrench workers, this will lead to increased underemployment and unemployment in post-Covid-19 Nigeria. This scenario is compounded by the fact that the two major cities (Lagos and Abuja) with strict enforcements of the lockdown is potentially the greatest destination for job seekers. It is critical to be conscious of the fact that the informal sector in Nigeria employs more than 65 percent of the labor force (*Civil Society Legislative, 2020*). The lockdown of the population and the closing of restaurants, bars, retailers, informal commerce etc. would lead to a disruption in many informal activities. By the end of the lockdown economists postulate that unemployment will co-exist side by side with inflation implying an increase in poverty and decrease in standard of living (*Baqae & Farhi, 2020*).

Furthermore, it must be mentioned that because of endemic corruption in Nigeria and the absence of a transparent and accountable structure, it may be difficult to hold the government to account for the Covid-19 expenses. At present the government has allegedly spent double of her yearly national budget amidst donations and aids from individuals and NGOs, there is therefore foreseeable bankruptcy on the side of government which may form the basis of government's inability to service the other sectors in post Covid-19 Nigeria. The lockdown coincided with the industrial strike action of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the umbrella labour union of all academics in public universities in Nigeria. The union has already embarked on an indefinite strike over nonpayment of their salaries by the Federal Government. If the government's expenditure on the Covid19 pandemic is sincere, it will be difficult to meet the demands of the union. At present, the government owes the union three months' salary and allowances; this may harden the union's position on any negotiation in post-Covid19 Nigeria. The implication of the strike action by the union is that universities except the private ones will remain closed and knowledge production stagnant. An elongated closure of the universities will give room for students to engage in some illegal and illicit activities which will further pressure the nation to a precipice.



## 6. Conclusion

The paper has explored the short, medium and long term implications of government response to the coronavirus pandemic outbreak in Nigeria. The paper argued among other things that as a fragile State, the lockdown policy of government will adversely affect the political economy of Nigeria. The paper identified; increased hunger, starvation, malnutrition, unemployment, armed robbery, kidnapping, economic recession, inflation, institutional decay, among others as the long and short term implications of government response. The study advocates that the government should evolve a unique response mechanism based on the prevailing economic conditions of the country and not copy verbatim the Western model to the containment approach of the virus. By and large, the paper makes a strong case for immediate reversal and revisiting of government response in order to forestall its debilitating future implications on Nigerians which might be more destructive than the covid19 pandemic.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**C.G. Chidume:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Supervision, Writing - review & editing. **C.N. Oko-Otu:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Methodology, Writing - original draft. **G.C. Aro:** Formal analysis, Validation.

## Declaration of competing interest

I, Dr. Chidume, Chukwudi G., the corresponding author in the manuscript titled, 'State Fragility and Covid-19 Pandemic: Implications on the Political Economy of Nigeria' wish to state that there is no conflict of interest to declare, thanks.

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