

Covid 19 and the Acts of Good Governance in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

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Abstract. The Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria like in all parts of the world has affected all aspects of governance in Nigeria. The Corona disease according to world health organization is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome called corona virus 2 (SARS-coV-2). It has really taken the world by surprise. Even the most developed and advanced nations are not spared. Covid-19 was reported in Nigeria in February where it spread to the other parts of the country rapidly thereby forcing the government to a total lockdown. The Federal Government responded to it by commissioning a presidential task Force responsible for updating the public about the disease which has exposed the federal government inadequacy in its accountability and transparency of governance, which are among the two elements of good governance. This paper will seek to address the strength and weaknesses of the federal government during this pandemic.

Keywords: Good Governance, Leadership Responsiveness, Transparency and Accountability

1. Introduction

Nigeria’s current transition to democracy commenced on May 29, 1999, at the end of General Abubakar’s short transition from military to civil rule, when President Obasanjo assumed power as an elected civilian head of state and government. Two and a half years into Obasanjo’s presidency, it can be said that Nigeria still requires very strong pillar for the

sustenance of its democratization before it can, ultimately, attain democratic consolidation. For example, it still requires strong democratic institutions and democrats with the appropriate democratic value, orientations, commitment, patience and resilience to make these institutions sustainable. The efforts to build these pillars are daily confronted and challenged by substantial threats, which manifest themselves. There is of course a strong relationship between good governance and democratic consolidation. It can be said that the more purposeful, focused and concerted the more towards good governance under a civilian dispensation- Defined in terms of transparency and accountability of public officials, responsible conduct, as well as their responsiveness to the demands, needs and aspirations of the governed, the greater the chances of successful democratic transition and consolidation. (Jega, 2007, 141-142).

2. Concept Clarification

2.1 Good Governance

The concept of governance is not new. It is as old as human civilization. Simply put governance means the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented). Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decision made and the formal and informal structures that

have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision. Government is one of the actors in governance, other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government. Good governance has 8 major characteristics. It is participatory, consensus, oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law. It assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision making. It is also responsive to the present and future needs of the society (Sheng, 1).

Good governance is said to require that the laws of the land are enforced impartially. It has been observed and reported that Nigerian leaders, military or civilian do not respect the rule of law particularly the constitution and court decisions. This has seriously affected the rights of individual citizens and the independence of the judiciary (Lawal and Awolabi, 2012). Accountability or transparency is another important element of good governance. It emphasizes accountability in the public, private and voluntary sectors of the society (Ekundayo, 2017).

In Nigeria, it has been observed that there is no accountability as well as its twin element of transparency by political; leaders in particular. when government leaders are accountable, its means that such a government is a listening government and is always prepared to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens or accountable to them for its actions and inactions. Unfortunately, it has been observed that no government. in Nigeria whether military or civilian has been responsive, accountable or transparent (Lawal, Imokhuede and Johnson, 2012) corruption free is another important index. This is because corruption is said to be antithetical to good governance. It has been revealed that the two words are opposites, the presence of one means the absence of other (Ekundayo, 2017).

Unfortunately, Nigerian's leadership since independence has often been said to comprise individuals most of whom are stingingly corrupt

and completely enmeshed in corruption. It is also generally acknowledged that there can be no good governance in Nigeria, if corruption is firmly rooted and well cultured in the country. It has been posited that corruption is everywhere in the world but the magnitude seems to be ridiculous in Nigeria and that it appears in the form of kickbacks, pay offs, bribery among other (Nwagboso and Duke, 2012). Good leadership is another key index, it is more or less a truism that the key factors to good governance is good leadership. Unfortunately, development of the society seems not well imbibed and acceptable by a greater number of Nigerian leaders as their major responsibility. Therefore, leadership and governance crisis in Nigeria since independence is said to be traceable to poor leadership. Absence of visionary leaders in Nigeria has been observed as the strongest factor militating against good governance in the country (Nwugbuso and Duke, 2012).

Elements of Good governance include:

- Participation
- Rule of law
- Transparency
- Responsiveness
- Broad Consensus
- Equality and inclusiveness
- Effectiveness and Efficiency
- Accountability
- Strategic Vision

2.2 Transparency

Transparency means that decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. It also means that information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in early understandable forms and media (Sheng: 2).

The principle of transparency is predicated and built on free information flow and dissemination. Institutional processes and information are to be made easily available to the people affected and adequate information in particular should be accessible in understandable

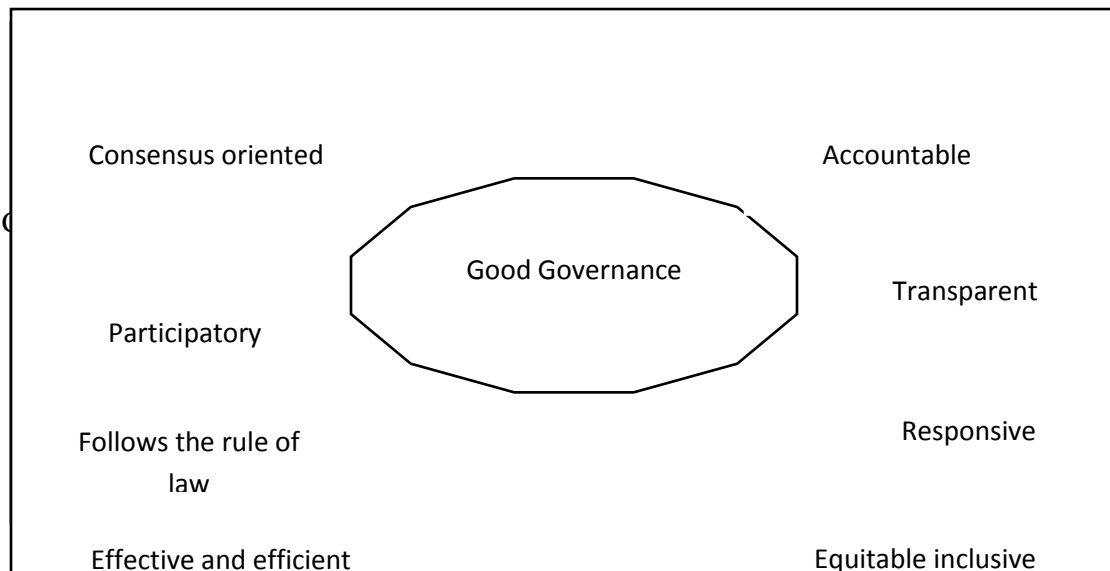
and monitorable form. To guarantee good governance practice, therefore, government policies are to be openly disseminated to the entire citizenry and the policies should be such that citizens can easily develop confidence in their intentions. In fact, the processes of decision making, the ultimate decisions reached and government actions taken are expected to be made open and subject to check by other organs of government and other non-governmental organizations (Andrews, 2008, Apaza, 2009, GisselQuist, 2012).

2.3 Accountability

Accountability is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders who is accountable to whom varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and the rule of law (Sheng, 2). The principle is the cornerstone of good governance's theory. It emphasizes that all actors, particularly those in government

business, voluntary agencies, and societies, civil societies among others are to be made answerable to the society (Rotberg, 2004, Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

This principle differs from organization to organization and depends on the source of the decision which could be within or without. The principles stipulates that political actors and civil servants are to be made answerable to the society for their actions hence, public officials including elected and appointed, are to be accountable for their political actions and answerable to the source or organ from which their power originates. It also emphasizes that public officials invested with political power are to be answerable for their actions to the source or organ from where their mandate is derived (Williams, 2009). The principle of accountability in the real sense, emphasizes answerability for the use of state resources and arrests ear marked for specific purposes, subject to the laws, and their requirements (Grindle, 2004, Harrison, 2005, Kurtz and Schrank, 2001, Nanda, 2006). This principle is the degree by which political actors have the ability and willingness to demonstrate consistency between their activities and the constitution (Gisselquist, 2012).



3. Theoretical Framework

Good Governance Theory is a governance theory that sets some basic principles according to which a good government. Such principles include accountability, control, responsiveness, transparency, public participation re-economy, efficiency etc. In sum, the theory of good governance is created to reflect all the principles enunciated above and many more (Minogue, Polidano and Hulme, 1998). In view of the foregoing and in line with the World Bank principles and policy interventions in third world countries, good governance involves an efficient public service, an independent judicial system and legal framework contracts and responsible administration of public funds. Other requirements for good governance include an independent public auditor responsible to a representative legislature, respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government and a pluralistic institutional structure. Good Governance is predicated on three segments of the society which have direct effect on governance as highlighted. The type of political regime, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of the economic and social resources with a view to development and the capacity of government to formulate policies and have them effectively implemented (world bank, 1992:3)

UNDP (2007) also espouses eight attributes: political participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus equality and inclusiveness, efficiency and effectiveness and accountability. From the various principles, ideas and conditions enunciated by the above mentioned international organization, the theory of good governance originated. Today, the theory is very relevant in that the normative question of how to create or ensure good governance remains a central concern in considering governance. This is based on the assumption that the quality of governance can be enhanced by adopting the principles of good governance as enunciated above and by reducing the role of the state in governing. It is also important to note here that several of the strands of thinking in governance have been deliberately

introduced in order to achieve enhanced good governance (Khan, 2008: Peter, 2010). As a result of the World Bank policy, all ideas enunciated by the IMF, UNDP and scholars constitute the principles of good governance theory in addition to independent judiciary, accountability, transparency, rule of law, human rights, among others. Therefore, good governance theory is aimed at achieving efficiency in public service to key private suppliers among others (Williams and Young, 1994). Furthermore, it will be duly emphasized that good governance theory is geared towards enhancing ways and means by which state bureaucracies carryout state activities and utilize state resources so as to protect individual and personal liberties (Sheng, 2008).

4. Research Method

The study made use of the secondary source of data to collate data through available document, books, articles, web sites, data collected from previous researches. Since secondary research is a systematic investigation which solely depend on existing data, the study involved collating, organizing and analyzing from already existing literatures. Secondary research is also known as desk research is a systematic procedure and evaluative steps to collect and interprets data.

5. Covid-19 in Nigeria

The coronavirus disease of 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic gripped the world with a shock, thereby overwhelming the health system of most nations. The world health organization (WHO) declared the novel human coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, which began in Wuhan, China on December 8, 2019, a public health emergency of International Concern (PAEIC) on January 30, 2020 (WHO, 2020) with over Seven million cases globally as of June 7 (2020): United States (over two million cases) Brazil (over 700,000 case), Russia (over 500,000 cases) and in Africa, South Africa (over 54,000 cases) and Egypt (over 38,000 cases) bear the greater brunt. Following the WHO declaration, the coronavirus preparedness group was constituted on January 31 in Nigeria, a country with 36

states and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT). WHO categorized Nigeria as one of the 13-high risk African countries with respect to the spread of COVID-19? Nigeria is also among the vulnerable African nations, given the weak state of the healthcare system (Marbot, 2020). In Africa, there are still communities without healthcare facilities, apart from the scarcity of health workers (Amzat, 2011).

The projection is that Africa could bear the final burden of the Covid-19 pandemic if the countries do not institute effective measures to combat the pandemic (Amzat, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyela, Ogundairo and Danjibo, 2020, 218).

In efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus, many countries including Nigeria have used a combination of various measures such as restriction of movements, physical/social distancing, and ban of public gatherings and place of worships, self-isolation and a 14-day quarantine period for returnees from some high-risk countries. Others include aggressive campaign for good personal hygiene, regular hands washing with soap under running water, use of alcohol-based sanitizers and use of face-masks. In addition, schools, companies and other public buildings were closed down to prevent community transmission of the disease. The president of Nigeria in a nationwide address on March 29, 2020, imposed a total lockdown in Ogun, Abuja and the country's commercial capital Lagos, for an initial period of two weeks so that the Federal Ministry of Health and Nigerian Centre for disease control (NCDC) and other stakeholders in the public health sector can make available the resources needed to control the spread of the disease. According to the president, the 14-day initial period of lockdown will also be used to identify, trace and isolate all individuals that had come in contact with confirmed cases, ensure the treatment of confirmed cases and prevent further spreads to other states (Ilorin, 2020:2).

The outbreak of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria is hinge on conspiracy theories, one of such belief is that Covid-19 is non-existence but a means for the government to divert public fund to private pocket. This position pervades public domain since public trust in government is low

(Odema, 2020). Another belief is that Covid-19 is a disease for the elites and wealthy individuals. This position seem catchy resulting from news from government officials, business leaders, celebrity, social and media personality who tested positive for the virus or died from coronavirus related illness (Campbell, 2020). Thus, despite public awareness on preventive measures of Covid-19, the lower class in the society perceived government regulations as a sham, thus increasing the rate of community transmission of the virus in Nigeria (Campbell and McCaslin, 2020).

5.1 Covid-19 and Acts of Governance in Nigeria

Leadership accountability and transparency are buzzwords in today's Nigeria society. The press is full of stories detailing the sordid affairs of leaders, organizations and agencies that have betrayed the confidence and trust if the public. Accountability and transparency are central to the art and science of governance of developed nations. The term describes a collective set of actions of leaders in all spheres of human endeavor, to account for actions taken, to be answerable to those that bestowed authority and to accept responsibility for the decision and the outcomes of activities under taken. (Nkechi, Nzewi and Augustine, 2020:24)

Transparency in government actions denotes increasing reliability and having a well-informed public (Agburuga, 2018; Doyle, 2005). It is, however, important to note that the concepts of accountability and transparency have a long tradition in both political and financial disciplines and they mean different things to different stakeholders. The central idea, however, remains that when decision-making powers are transferred from a principal (e.g. the citizens) to an agent (e.g. the government), there must be a mechanism in place for holding the agent to account for their decision and if necessary, imposing sanctions, ultimately by removing the agent from power. In accounting, accountability refers to financial prudence and accounting with regulations and instruction (Lindberg, 2009), while transparency stands for responsive communication that incorporate

various stakeholders in the communication process and justification to the citizens, of decisions taken by the government (Fairbanks, Plowman, and Rawlins, 2007).

The imminent challenge for government in Nigeria is to make citizens trust government agencies for there appears to be a nexus between citizens' satisfaction and the execution of government policies and programmes. This was captured by Doyle (2005) who opines that if the citizens are satisfied with government actions, they will also be satisfied with the government and its representatives. It is a known fact that public trust in government and political institutions has been declining in Nigeria over the years, behind which lies many reasons such as lack of citizen's satisfaction in government policies and diminished expectations. Other reasons are lack of transparency, accountability and poor government performance. (Mahmood, 2016).

Accountability involves stewardship and the obligation to accept responsibility. Leadership, accountability and transparency are detailed in the interplay between the governed and the government, people in power and how they answer for, or account for one action to some authority by reference to a defined benchmark. Nation Building which is understood as the practices and meaning that serve to create a shared cultural identity within governed state and further aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. (Beumar, 2019). Therefore, government policy progress depends on its ability to secure citizens' buy-in of the policies and programmes of government. Nation building is a process which lends to the formation of a country in which citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences (Alesing and Reich, 2012, cited in Onuoha and Ugwueze (2014).

Nigeria is particularly vulnerable & inefficiencies and losses from corruption because it involves the complex mix of actors with diverse responsibilities. Government actions continue to find themselves under the microscope of public scrutiny, leading to issues

of governance, accountability, transparency and nation building. There exist loss of trust which have insurmountable ramifications for a nation in attracting and establishing relationships with other sovereign nations and fostering legitimacy. Lack of accountability and transparency in leadership and governance leads to non-fulfilling of government obligations, profligate use of public finance, increased private interests, law leanness and ineptitude, loss of will by public workers and loss of meritocracy and promotion of mediocrity in the public sphere and administration (Agburuga, 2018) Anne, Deirdre, Tanryn, Jillian and Giller, 2018).

Countries cannot ignore corruption during the Covid-19 response. Even in ordinary times, research has shown that corruption in the health sector causes losses of US\$455 billion per year and, according to OECD estimates up to US\$2 trillion of procurement costs could be lost to corruption. How do we consider this reality during a global pandemic, when there are increased opportunities for corruption to take place, while at the same time not compromising an effective public health response? Experiencers has shown that applying a risk-based prioritization framework is a crucial first step tailored to each content, the framework should determine which governance, transparency and accountability mechanisms must be integrated into all Covid-19 public health response planning and design. This framework should prioritize deterring those forms of Compton that stand to most severely undermine both the equality and speed of the public health response. Indeed, there may be time when works and mitigating measures identified during ordinary times are deprioritized during an emergency response (Clark, wierzynska, DiBase, Timilsina, 2020).

The adoption of a multi-stake holder and multi-sectoral oversight body, involving government, Civil society, academia and anti-corruption, audit and oversight institutions, will help to raise awareness, and to bridge the health and anti-corruption communities promoting dialogue and cooperation to mitigate corruption risks and make the most of available resources (Clark, wierzynska, DiBiase, Timilsina, 2020)

Community led monitoring mechanisms which place greater reliance on bottom up social accountability from the public itself are central to a robust response. Measures to increase transparency of data and decision making, as well as channels for citizens to safely report instances of potential corrupt acts are paramount. For example, use of digital technology to report falsified medical products, shortages in supplies and other irregularities related to procurement or asserts, should be encouraged. (Clark, wierzynska, DiBiase, Timilsina, 2020)

The issue of transparency and Accountability of the Nigerian Government have been an issue of mistrust and in competence by the government to its citizens. Citizens believe that the irresponsible and undemocratic attitude of the government is the cause of all the crises in Nigeria. Covid-19 Pandemic period was not an exception. The masses accused the government. Of making life difficult for it citizens and the government officials in charge of the Covid-19 funds were just enriching themselves. Thus, how did the government respond to the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria? These include:

Lockdown and movement restriction: The Federal Government announced a lockdown on 30th March, 2020 in Lagos and Ogun states, as well as Abuja (Federal Capital Territory) and later Kano state, which are considered as the epicenter of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). This was followed by similar directive by some states government culminating in to closure of schools, religion, social and sport gathering as well as movement restriction and interstate travel ban. The Federal Government also institute the presidential task force (PTF) to keep update with the management of Covid-19 I Nigeria (NCDC, 2020. This is coupled with the establishment of emergency operations centers as a rigid response strategy to flattening the curve of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020)

Distribution of palliative: Another major response by the government cushion the effect of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria was the distribution of palliatives such as food items and

conditional cash transfer to the poor and vulnerable citizens. The beneficiaries of the conditional cash transfer were estimated to cover 3.6 million citizens who depend on daily wage and persons with disabilities, whose means of livelihood has been negatively affected by Covid-19 lockdown and movement restrictions (Njoku. Ebiri, Olumide, Musa and Agboluaje, 2020). Private individual and civil society organizations also supported the government through cash donations and distributions of parcels of food items to the needy (Abara, 2020). Similarity, the government also continued the home-grown school feeding programme amid at addressing malnutrition and ensuring provision of food ration to school children amid Covid-19 pandemic (Onwuzoo, 2020).

Fiscal Stimulus Measure: Fiscal stimulus such as interest rate reductions, tax cuts and tax holidays were implemented to mitigate the effect of covid-19 pandemic on small and medium scale enterprises for instance, the government. Implemented tax holidays for small business against company income tax while tax rate for medium businesses were revised downwards from 30% to 20% (Nnanna, 2020). The CBN also approved uniform exchange rate system for inter-bank market to ease pressure on foreign exchange rates (Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020). Other stimulus measures include the establishment of #50 billion interactive fund to improve health facilities in the country (Nnanna, 2020, Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020).

Human right Abuse: The enforcement of lockdown, movement restrictions and curfew by the security agents were met with human right violation, degrading treatment, illegal confiscation of properties, extortion and unlawful asserts. The National Human Rights Commission (202) reveals that security forces used excessive or disproportionate force leading to deaths in Kaduna, Abia, Delta, Niger, Ebonyi and Katsina State. The NHRC (2020) also identifies the Nigeria police force, the Nigeria Army and Nigeria Correctional service to be responsible for the highest cases of human right Violations during Covid-19 lockdown and movement restrictions. In the same vein, various cases of gender-based violence including rape and domestic violence such as spousal violence and parent- child abuse were largely reported

during Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in Nigeria (Amnesty International, 2020; NHRC, 2020).

Poor coordination of palliative: Palliative aid to the poor and vulnerable was characterized by coordination problems. The eligibility criteria for the Federal Government Covid-19 palliative aid includes inability to recharge mobile phone with ₦100, bank balance not more than ₦5000, and referral by community leader (Njoku, et al, 2020). These criteria fall short of standard indications (disability status, income, employment and education) for measuring household poverty (World Bank, 2014). Therefore, palliative aid meant to cushion the effect of Covid-19 lockdown on the poor and vulnerable may not achieve its intended objectives moreover, in what could be seen as party politics affairs, palliatives and were given to party loyalists at the expense of the poor and vulnerable in the society (Njoku et al, 2020).

Inadequate Fiscal Policy: The Conventional fiscal policy measures (Interest rate reductions, tax cuts and tax holidays) introduced by the government to mitigate the effect of Covid-19 pandemic on small and medium scale enterprises may be effective when a decrease in aggregate demand is met with an increase in supply and vice-verse (Al-Ghwell, 2020; Bjornland, 2000; Oladipo and fabayo, 2020). However, the outbreak of covid-19 pandemic causes a decrease in both demand and supply in the global economic chain (Al-Ghwell, 2020). The demand factors include limitations in spending and declining consumptions due to movement restrictions, curfew and social distancing occasioned by covid-19 pandemic. The supply factors include low productions, layoff, and the risk of factory shutdown due to economy downturn of Covid-19 pandemic. The combinations of these two factors will manifest in Nigeria's unemployment rate and low GDP.

Ineffective coordination of Covid-19 lockdown across the state: Although the Federal government announced a lockdown in Lagos and Ogun states, as well as Abuja (federal Capital Territory) and later Kano state which are considered as the epicenter of Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). Corresponding response were not enforced by sub national government across the states Policy

inconsistency on the implementation of lockdown creates a lacuna for movement of people and goods as well as nonobservance to the WHO Covid-19 protocol. Since the virus is highly contagious, ineffective coordination of Covid-19 lockdown and protocols in one part of the state will aggregate the spread of the virus in the country.

The Socio-Economic rights and Accountability project (SERAP) filed a law suit against Dr. Osagie Ehanire, the minister of health and Dr. Chikwe Ihekweazu, Director General, Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) over their alleged failure to account for the public funds and other resources so far spent to combat the spread of Covid-19 in Nigeria. SERAP is also seeking an order of mandamus to direct and compel the Federal government to disclose information on the exact number of texts that have been carried out for high ranking public officials and politicians, the number of any such high ranking, public officials and politicians now in self-isolation or quarantine, as well as the exact number of texts that have been carried out for the country's poorest and most vulnerable people. SERAP said that transparency in the use of Covid-19 money would help to reduce the risk of corruption or opportunism, build trust and engage Nigerians in the fight against coronavirus as well as safe lives (Bamgboye, 2020)

6. Conclusion

Needless to say that the crisis of the Nigerian state far from being managerial has always been structural and it has its roots in the relations of exploitation, unjust domestic class structures, external dependency and distortions of the neo-colonial social formations (Ake, 1986:72). Jega (2002) write that to ensure a sustainable democracy and good of governance in the fourth republic, the three arms of government namely: the legislature, judiciary and the executive must be restructured to make them amenable to propose political and socio-economic restructuring. There cannot be democracy without a viable state just as good governance cannot be attained in the midst of prebendalism, piracy, indolence and ineptitude.

The elements of good governance i.e. transparency and accountability is what the government lack and that is the major causes of incompetence and irresponsible acts on the part of the government coupled with the unexpected trauma of Covid-19 has caused the Federal government to exhibit some loopholes in their policies and implementation regarding their performing in curtailing and acting on the Covid-19.

The lack of stable rule of law has always been the major structure lacking in the acts of good governance in Nigeria's fourth republic which has mounted to the question of our democratic institutions.

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