



COVID 19 Pandemic: Religious Leadership and the Challenges of Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the effects of SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 in Nigeria as relates to issues of religion and the challenges of good governance. The recent outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in most countries of the world, which culminated in governments across the globe, instituting measures of lockdown as a means of containing the spread of the virus, appears to be a perceptible assessment for the religious institutions to re-evaluate their allegiance and commitment to good governance in Nigeria. The paper is a qualitative assessment of the issues of religious beliefs and the challenges of good governance in Nigeria as undergirded by the outbreak of coronavirus pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in social distancing and banning of congregational religious activities in most countries of the world, was seen as a threat to religious activities by some religious groups and leadership in Nigeria. This notion consequently led to various utterances and actions that challenged the responsive efforts of government in containing the virus. The paper argues that such conducts are inimical to state public health measures and good governance in Nigeria. It, therefore, surmises that religious groups, particularly their leaders, need to discontinue from complicating an already challenged political leadership of the country, rather they should endeavour to use their enormous influence and contribute towards good governance by controlling faith-based emotions, synergizing and assisting the government, especially in such difficult time in history as presented by the pandemic. If religious sentiments are significantly controlled, democratic governance in Nigeria will fare better.

Keywords: *COVID-19 Pandemic; Religious Leadership; Good Governance*

Introduction

Nigeria, being a sovereign country after sixty years of self-rule has continued to grapple with the challenges of quality leadership and sustainable democratic government. More so, leadership issues and good governance in Nigeria have remained a perennial challenge that is being compounded by religious factors. As one of the most religious countries in the world, religious sentiments are always placed on the front burner of emergent issues. Given that the country is equally heterogeneous, religious dynamics have continued to be key factors in determining and influencing fundamental state policies and decisions (Udeagha and Nwamah, 2020). Religious actors through negative engagements of faith identity have consistently distorted national identity and impeded development. This recurrent manner of using religion

to obstruct national wellbeing was reinforced during the pandemic as matters of faith and practice trailed against measures of containing the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

The events of 2020 will remain a remarkable global subject as the world witnessed SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19; a contagion pandemic of unprecedented proportions. The origin of the SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19 has largely been stalked with controversy. Typically, some Nigerian religious leaders claim that it was from God, for sinners in the world to repent (Falade, 2020). However, the virus started in Wuhan City of China in December 2019. While the disease was officially named on February 11, 2020 as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by the World Health Organization (WHO), the scientific name for the virus that causes it was equally designated by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses, as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (Liu and Shih, 2020; Nelson 2020). The deadly virus has unfortunately evolved into a global pandemic of palpable panic. As a result of its endemic effects, on March 11, 2020, the virus was consequently declared a pandemic by WHO (Liu and Shih, 2020). The COVID-19 is a respiratory disease that is mainly transmitted through droplets containing the virus and contact routes, the very reason for lockdown and social distancing because, it can be contacted through an infected person when he talks, coughs, sneezes or touches any of such contaminated surfaces. Thus, contacts between humans will likely facilitate the spread of the virus. Correspondingly, various countries and governments devised measures of preventing its spread.

However, the pandemic spread like a wildfire throughout the world and made its way to Africa. Nigeria, unfortunately, recorded the first case of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa. Since its arrival in Nigeria on February 27, 2020, following a confirmed case of coronavirus on an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria (Odutonla, 2020; Folurunsho-Francis, 2020), there have been serious challenges on how to control it. The government and its agencies, particularly through the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), paid their attention on controlling and curbing the pandemic. In line with WHO directives and other global public health measures, federal and state governments in Nigeria instituted lockdown procedures and other preventive directives. Nevertheless, the efforts of the government in controlling the pandemic in Nigeria were challenged by religion and ignorance.

Nigerians approached the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic with mixed reactions and elements of religious sentiments. There are, therefore, four categories of perceptions about the pandemic among Nigerians. The first group, which include some religious leaders approached it as real global pandemic and keyed into personal and public health measures, including assisting government efforts in containing the virus. The second group did not believe in the virulent nature of the pandemic; they thought it will not survive in Nigeria; they saw it as fake and jokingly dismissed it as a typical substandard Chinese product (Alao, 2020). The third group, which is mostly influenced by religious instincts and fundamentalism, wrote off the pandemic entirely and totally dismissed it as hoaxed western plot and calculated attack on their faith (Hoechner, 2020). The fourth group approached it largely on faith basis; these are mainly religious actors and leaders; they described it as satanic, which could be handled through faith healing. Some of them, therefore, opposed congregational ban (Chioma, 2020; Abati 2020; Igwe 2020). While the second group displayed chronic ignorance, the third and fourth groups mostly demonstrated unhealthy religious sentiments which tend to obfuscate the efforts of government in managing the spread of the pandemic. The focus of this paper is on the last three groups that their actions are largely informed by ignorance and religion, and more on the last two that are based on religious emotions and interests. It appears that what did not go down well with the religious groups and especially their leaders, was the banning of congregational religious activities (Ibrahim, 2020), which is the foremost avenue of sustaining religious teachings, demonstrating their power, controlling the congregation and gaining financial and other essential benefits from their followers.

Consequently, some of them resorted to antithetical practices to redirect the attention of the people to themselves and continue to control them. Some of the strategies they adopted include the concoction of conspiracy theories, feeding their followers with misinformation, opposing acceptable

global health measures and flagrantly flouting government directives (Egbunike, 2020). It is against this background that the paper examines roles of religious groups during coronavirus pandemic in relation to good governance in Nigeria.

Methods

The study is a qualitative assessment of the role of religious leaders during the covid 19 pandemic lockdown and its impact on good governance in Nigeria. As Ejizu (2013) rightly noted, in the humanities qualitative research concerns focus on the problems of “meaning, human values, cultural beliefs, aesthetics”, and similar issues. The method leverages on non-numerical data to gain insight of people’s thoughts and conducts as well as the prevailing circumstances or reasons behind them. This paper, therefore, derived from video clips and voice recordings of the Nigerian religious leaders to understand their diverse perspectives and different conducts in the heat of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions. Data were equally obtained from written sources and news media, mostly newspaper reports. The data generated were analysed and presented using thematic content analysis.

Results and Discussion

Public Health Measures and Challenges of Religion: A Background to the COVID-19 Experience

Since the return of democratic government in 1999, public health measures by successive Nigerian governments that normally follow global health standards, have been greatly disputed with religious conspiracy theories laced with ignorance. Corruption and inefficiency of the political leadership of Nigeria has drawn public indignation and opprobrium against secular leadership. The result is that Nigerians mostly do not trust their political leaders based on perennial cases of disappointment and back-to-back experiences of unfulfilled promises. Since Nigeria is a state of many ethnic nationalities that are likewise divided by religious identities, distrust has further corroded the sense of national unity. On the flip side, the trust has been largely channelled to ethnic and religious identities. As such, religious and ethnic influencers always leverage on these primordial instincts to attain selfish goals and make good governance a tough task.

Subsequently, some government assisted public health measures have been incapacitated by the religious sector. As Tomori (2018) observes, part of the reasons for the 2003 boycott of polio vaccine in northern Nigeria was the distrust of the government of the time and influence of powerful ethnic and religious leaders, who instructed that parents should not accept the immunization of their children. That Nigerian politicians are disappointingly known to be selfish and insensitive about the plight and wellbeing of the masses, as ordinary Nigerians grapple along with essential health needs was pivotal in raising the doubts. Thus, the idea that the government was embarking on unsolicited vaccination programme, when there are hardly available and affordable health care facilities to cater for their critical health challenges, was met with serious suspicion (Jegade, 2007). Some imams preached against it as being contrary to Islamic order on diseases (Falade, 2020). One of the powerful Islamic religious groups in Nigeria, the Jama’atu Nasril Islam, corroborated the claims of Kano State officials that they found oestrogen and progesterone, which are some hormones that could trigger infertility among females (Walsh, 2004). This tend to inform the belief that the vaccine is contaminated with anti-fertility agents that are targeted at reducing the population of Muslims. As Jegede (2007) equally notes, Datti Ahmed, a physician and leader of the Supreme Council of Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN), taught that the polio vaccine was corrupted with anti-fertility drugs and contaminated with virus that can cause HIV and AIDS by the Americans and their western cronies. To this end, Ghinai et al (2013) contended that the polio vaccination came at a time the United States of America (USA) led the invasion in Afghanistan and Iran, which raised the suspicion that there is a religious campaign by the Americans and the Christian world against Islam. The suspicion appears to be connected to the 2001 September 9/11 bomb attacks in the USA. It is

apparently in this regard that Magbadelo (2011) argued, that the manner with which the Americans tried to punish all those that planned and executed the deadly September 9/11 terrorist attack included the use of vaccination by the CIA against Pakistanis and equally making it a public knowledge. He emphasized that such could inform negative notions about vaccinations in northern Nigeria. However, what ultimately appears to inform the negative notion of the northern religious leaders stemmed from the 1996 ugly experience of Pfizer, the USA pharmaceutical firm, and their Trovan Floxacin testing for meningitis in northern Nigeria. It happened that the Trovan testing led to critical health damages including deformities and death of 11 children that participated in the exercise (Archibong and Annan, 2021). This made the northern religious leaders to see the polio vaccination as a weapon of war from the USA and western world against the northern Muslim population of Nigeria. It was so disturbing that the Muslim leader, Ahmed Datti, described the USA and their western allies as “modern-day Hitlers” (Walsh, 2004; Jegede 2007). Whereas the suspicion of the northern religious leaders appears not to be absolutely a conspiracy theory or totally unfounded, it obstructed the polio vaccination scheme in the area. The boycott lingered for 15 months (Tomori, 2015). It, however, took a lot of sensitization and awareness campaigns from federal government, some influential traditional and Islamic leaders like the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa’ad Abubakar, and the health sector to win the war against polio in Nigeria.

Similarly, in 2014, during the Ebola outbreak, there were also some dangerous misinformation spreading throughout the nation via text messages and social media that people should bathe with salt water and drink it for protection against the virus. The instruction to bathe with salted water allegedly came from the ruler of Igala kingdom, Idakwo Michael Ameh Oboni, the Attah of Igala and a frontline traditional religious ruler in Kogi state, as a prescription for his subjects (Emmanuel and Ibeh, 2014; Hassan, 2020). The prescription of salt and water solution was also strengthened following information that a renowned catholic priest, The Reverend Father Ejike Mbaka, asked his members to perform some religious rituals that involved drinking salt and water mix (Emmanuel and Ibeh, 2014). The force of social media carried these pieces of information in a manner they went viral, and a lot of people embraced such idea of salt solution as a cure for Ebola. The result was that some people died, and several others hospitalised, owing to excess salt intake (Aliyu and Nalong, 2014). The state, though, made concerted efforts in battling the deadly disease and eventually nipped Ebola in the bud.

Inferences from the above indicate that even as there have been obvious leadership concerns, successive Nigerian governments have demonstrated commendable efforts in dealing with outbreak of diseases in the country, but some members of the religious sector have a tendency of obstructing the efforts of the government in promoting public health by fighting these diseases. The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately followed this awkward pattern.

COVID-19 Misinformation and Conspiracy Theories by Nigerian Religious Leaders

The COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in a lockdown was largely seen as a threat to religious activities by some religious leaders in Nigeria. As Ibrahim (2020) remarks, “the biggest bone of contention was the policy banning congregational, which produced a direct hit on accumulation in the religious sector “. While the government was busy informing the people, creating awareness about the virus and how it operates, some religious leaders largely out of the quest to perpetually control the people and prey on their seeming ignorance for their personal gains, adopted what can be regarded as misinformation and conspiracy theories. At the heat of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, a numbers of video clips of different Nigerian religious leaders’ positions on COVID-19 pandemic surfaced online. The controversial ones, including those that denote conspiracy theories went viral and trended on different media platforms.

Foremost among these conspiracy theorists is Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder of Believers Love World Church, otherwise known as ‘Christ Embassy’. He weaved his theory about COVID-19 together with 5G technology rollout. He dismissed the reality of the pandemic and taught that the claims

of COVID-19 and 5G are the handiwork of satanic agents that clamour for a new world order, designed to control human thoughts and actions through vaccine and digital ID (Ibrahim, 2020). Pastor Chris called it 'global siege' and notes that the Nigerian federal government was pushed to lock down Lagos and Abuja because of 5G. He alleged that the 5G has already been tested in Abuja and the reason for the lockdown is for the federal government to install 5G. He further deduced that COVID-19 compliant churches or COVID-19 free churches was in the offing. They are churches where people infected with COVID-19 cannot attend. It would involve COVID-19 registrations. He berated fellow ministers of the gospel, who accepted the lockdown measures instead of opting to pray as a solution for the pandemic in Nigeria. Oyakhilome tacitly opposed WHO, and other professional directives on wearing of facemasks as a measure of curtailing the virus, he discouraged wearing facemasks because it is self-poisoning.

Similarly, Sheikh Sani Yahaya Jingir, the leader of Izala Muslim sect, the largest Salafi group in Nigeria (Hoechner, 2020), taught that there is no coronavirus, noting that it is a western scheme to subvert the practice of Islam. He alleged that the enemies targeted such Islamic religious obligations like congregational prayers, pilgrimage, handshakes and preaching (Ibrahim, 2020). It is his teaching that so many young Muslims believed and subscribed to, that they started gyrating about, corroborating that there is nothing like coronavirus by singing "there is no corona" as a hit song in some communities in the north (Hechner, 2020). The misinformation was so damaging that it got to the extent in a video that surfaced online in April 2020, and went viral, a northern youth (Lee, 2020), amidst his friends who cheered him, made practical demonstration of the unreality of COVID-19. In the clip, he made mockery of the pandemic, washed his hands in a bowl and drank the water he used in washing his hands to prove that corona virus is false and cannot affect him.

Another line of conspiracy theory emanated from Abubakar Shakau, the leader of the deadly Boko Haram terrorist group, who is notorious for his loathness of western ideals. In a voice recording that was publicised on Tuesday, April 14, 2020, he described the coronavirus pandemic as a product of the evil of infidels and equally described public health measures to control it as part of the attack against Islam by evil forces (Campbell, 2020). Shekau condemned lockdown as evil because it prevents the observation of Islamic obligations. He mocked some world leaders including President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria, taunting their health measures as ineffective, while claiming that he and his members have anti-corona virus. It is pertinent to recall that the group is averse to democratic government and have variously and violently attacked many institutions of government in Nigeria. Their conspiracy theory over COVID-19 is so dangerous that Bukarti (2020) describes Boko Haram as security threat and public health risk.

Another view of conspiracy theory came from Apostle Johnson Suleiman, the General Overseer and Senior Pastor of Omega Fire Ministries International, who saw the outbreak as a grand scheme by some world leaders to pull off a new world order. In a video that went viral on March 28, 2020, the Apostle supposed that COVID-19 was manufactured and not a biological case, but a chemical weapon. He claimed that many people contacted it through testing, as people go for the test, they are being infected with the virus, and that the few that tested negative is just a cover up to balance the equation. Suleiman alleged that Italy was sacrificed for the plan because, the Pope was involved in the plot and that is why Italy recorded about the largest number of cases. He further said that the vaccine will be produced, but it will transmit the disease, and if people are told to take the vaccine and they refuse, they will be denied a lot of things. The vaccine he supposed will be infected with the real disease and set with signals to control human beings by relaying information from human body to their power base.

All these and other conspiracy theories across the globe were apparently contrary to what medical, scientific and technological experts taught and advised about the pandemic based on evidence, facts and statistics (McLaughlin, 2020). They were, therefore, refuted by health organizations, Information Technology (IT) professionals, and governments (Warren, 2020; Tambe, 2021). As most Nigerians trust their religious leaders more than the government, the misinformation coming from them

appears to be a great challenge to the efforts of the Nigerian government to ensure that the people are protected against the COVID-19 pandemic. Sequel to the challenge of peddling disingenuous theories and misleading information was the unhelpful behaviours of some religious leaders during the lockdown.

Uncooperative Activities of Some Religious Actors during the Lockdown

A few uncooperative activities of some religious leaders and their followers during the lockdown, which undermined government's efforts, are worth reflecting on. At the peak of the pandemic, towards the end of March 2020, the social space was inundated with a video that surfaced online, where a crowd, mostly young people corroborate the opinion of their religious leaders, as they were taught to believe that the pandemic is a hoax. With apparent expression of joy, these youths in different places in Kano were chanting and singing, "malam Yache Babu corona, muma, munchai Babu corona", meaning, "teacher said there is no corona, and we agree, there is no corona" (Alao, 2020; Folorunsho-Francis, 2020). Hoechner (2020) reveals that the teacher they cited in the chant is an Islamic scholar, Shakyh Sani Yahaya Jingir, who is based in Jos, the capital of Plateau State that is known for religious sentiments and tensions because of its diverse ethno-religious composition in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. She surmises that "Shaykh Jingir has caused a stir in recent weeks with his incendiary sermons denouncing the coronavirus pandemic as yet another western plot to stymie the practice of Islam" (Hoechner, 2020, p. 1). Not quite long afterward, Kano State recorded its first confirmed case of COVID-19 on April 11, 2020, through a retired technocrat, who returned from Lagos (Odutonla, 2020; Folorunsho-Francis, 2020). Consequently, people in Kano started dying in alarming proportions. Akinwotu and Hodi (2020) observe that the city and Nigerians were alarmed, following a reported increase in the spate of death by more than six hundred within a week in April 2020. Although the cause of the jerk up in Kano's death toll was largely controversial, as those that died were not previously tested positive for COVID-19. The state Governor, Abdulhahi Umar Ganduje termed it "mysterious deaths". The State Government refused to link it with the COVID 19 pandemic, instead through its Ministry of Health; they described the sudden and shocking increase in mortality as complications arising from other illnesses like hypertension, diabetes, meningitis and acute malaria (Izundu, 2020; Maclean, 2020; Akinwotu and Burke, 2020). These unusual hundreds of deaths do not only prompt fears of explosive outbreak and rapid spread of the virus, but the fact that the virus is known to be worse in cases where there are underlying health issues like those highlighted by the Kano State Government is quite telling. With subsequent tests, it was understood that Kano was already besieged by the virulent virus and the populous city turned out its epicentre in northern Nigeria (Akinwotu and Burke, 2020; Muhammad, 2020). This forced the State government to later acknowledge that they have a problem with coronavirus (Maclean, 2020). Perhaps, Kano would not have had such jump in death tolls if not for the misinformation by some religious leaders that made the people to start living carefree lifestyles without observing measures that would have curtailed the spread of the virus.

In some instances, government efforts and directives to check the spread of coronavirus were flagrantly disobeyed by some religious leaders and their followers. While the outcomes of these disobediences in some places were peacefully resolved, some others triggered violence and riots. A typical instance is the riotous protest that rocked Katsina over government's advice to stick to the lockdown directives that forbid large gatherings, which involves the ban of congregational Friday Jumats prayers and Sunday church services. On Friday, March 27, 2020, one Mallam Hassan and his followers in apparent deviance of the state directives, conducted a Friday Jumats prayer in a mosque in Kusada, the headquarters of Kusada Local Government Area of Kastina State (Nseyem, 2020; Oyelude, 2020; Wahab, 2020). As a result, police invited him for questioning. Some irate Muslim youths became violent and riotous to the degree they attacked Kusada Divisional Police Station, set it ablaze and burnt down the station over the suspension of Jumats prayer and the arrest of their leader (Oyelude, 2020; Adeniyi, 2020). In the wake the incident, life was lost, and properties worth millions of naira were destroyed. Some of the Muslims, unfortunately, thought that the ban against congregational religious activities is a calculated attempt by secular government to control and regulate their religious obligations, therefore, several imams

were also involved in the violation of the lockdown measures and were consequently banned (Krippa, 2020). The violation was not only found among Muslims.

Some Christian religious leaders were also culpable in the noncompliance with government regulations concerning the coronavirus pandemic, which led to the law enforcement agents monitoring compliance with government directives to close some churches in Lagos, Ogun, Abuja etc. (Irekamba, 2020). However, among the mega churches, it was reported that Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church, otherwise known as ‘Winners’ Chapel’, disregarded government directions on large gathering as two sections of church services held without such SARS-CoV-2 health measures, like checking temperatures and provisions of hand sanitizers (Ogundipe, 2020). He associated the virus to the oppression of the devil that has no medical cure and wondered how hospitals would be opened and church closed (Kenechi, 2020) Even when police officers showed up to request that the services should not hold for the good of the church and the general public, the Bishop went ahead and held church service at the Sango Ota, Canaan Land Church auditorium, the headquarters of the church that is said can gather about 250, 000 worshippers in event of overflow (Ogundipe, 2020). While some other churches in Lagos and Ogun States were closed by the security agents for the violation of the ban on public gatherings of more than 50 persons, they were hesitant to enforce the same ban at Canaan Land (Ogundipe, 2020). Ogundipe (2020) further notes that this is because of Oyedepo’s friendship with high-ranking politicians in Nigeria and massive influence. Making some people scapegoats and others sacred cows for the same offence is a tacit endorsement for the ones treated with kid’s glove to continue to break laws and challenge the government unnecessarily. It also portrays Nigeria in a very bad light in the comity of nations. To demonstrate the challenge of leadership as a result, the federal Government through its Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Muhammed regretted thus:

Let me say, without mincing words, that we are not getting the kind of cooperation that this moment (of corona virus outbreak) deserves from Nigerians. Many people are busy engaging in meaningless criticisms instead of complying with the stipulated directives to keep people safe. Some Nigerians defied orders to stay away from large gatherings while some religious leaders wilfully flouted the directives to ensure social distancing (Silas, 2020, p.1).

Whereas the position of some of the religious groups tended to stifle the efforts of government, some were cooperative and helpful. Among the Muslims, for instance, the Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), which is the leadership body of Muslims in Nigeria, and some state Islamic Council of Imams and Ulama, showed concern, instructing their members on congregational bans with tips of necessary precautionary measures that will prevent the spread of the virus so that lives can be preserved (Egwu, 2020). Similarly, the National Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), which comprises Christian and Muslim leaders and Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) etc., took initiatives of the public health emergency and helped the efforts of the government in combating the spread of the virus (Ezigbo, 2020, Egwu, 2020). Some Christian leaders like Tunde Bakare of the Later Rain Assembly Church, supported government’s efforts and berated Christian leaders who opposed such efforts, he rather challenged them to offer their halls to government as isolation centres (Krippah, 2020). Some other Christian denominations donated medical facilities and medical equipment to the government to support the fight against the virus (Eyoboka, 2020; Adebayo n.d.). Good governance in Nigeria requires the religious sector to always support government’s effort as need arises.

Summary and Conclusion

Since independence, Nigeria has been a state bedevilled with unstable and inept leadership, which apparently stifles development. The expectation of freedom that culminated in the clamour for self-rule in 1960, has been undermined by the quality of leadership that has managed the governmental affairs of Nigeria, both in civil and military rules. The result is that most of the people neither trust the government

nor some of their policies. Besides, religion has evolved to be a source of solace and succour to the people especially, in difficult times like the case of coronavirus. In difficulties people rather pay attention to their religious leadership for spiritual guidance, than the governments that have perennially failed in meeting with their yearnings. As such, the majority believes hook, line and sinker, the information and directives coming from their religious leaders. Some religious leaders have shown tact in managing these enormous trusts that are reposed on them, while others have observably cashed in on such dominant power to manipulate their followers and undermine the government.

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be another spontaneous test for the Nigerian religious sector to re-evaluate its obligation to the state in tandem with the quest for good governance and national welfare. Given that Nigeria is largely bedevilled with unreliable health care system, the best bet is to ensure that the virus was promptly prevented as it has rattled advanced nations with best medical systems. To this end, the federal and state governments made some concerted efforts. While some of the religious groups supported the efforts of the government in tackling the pandemic, some others evidently sabotaged these efforts through their actions, utterances, and outright flouting of government's directives.

Government should, therefore, be decisive in asserting the principle of rule of law in all cases. Nigeria needs competent leadership that understands the core challenge of Nigeria and rise far above primordial identities in a manner that any erring religious actor that flagrantly flouts government directives and rules, should be handled in accordance with the principles of the rule of law. Understandably, undue sentiments and volatility of religion have made the government and its institutions to be circumspect in dealing with religious issues. Therefore, religious leaders should show good examples and desist from disrupting government efforts or breaking the laws. In fact, the capricious nature of religion in Nigeria and powerful influence of the religious leaders demand a synergy of efforts from religious and secular leadership to engender good governance and sustainable development. If religious sentiments are curtailed, democratic governance in Nigeria will considerably fare better.

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