

## Social Change, Criminality and COVID-19: The Nigerian Case Study

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### Abstract

This study examines how COVID-19 has induced social changes and criminality in Nigeria as a result of economic lockdown, restriction on inter-state movement, closure of international borders, restriction of religious worship, restrictions on all forms of marital rites, ban on all burial and funeral activities, suspension of all educational activities, and social interactions replaced by social distancing. Due to this alteration of the normal human life, and since survival is key, hence the issue of criminality. This paper examined cases of criminality in the country during lockdown, government interventions to mitigate the increase in criminality as a result of the pandemic, implication of COVID-19 on fashion, determinant, forms and resistance to social change. The paper is qualitative in nature and relied principally on secondary data to achieve the scope of the study, these include publications sourced from text books, bulletins, journals, government documents, newspapers and internet. The conflict and conspiracy theory of social change was adopted as the theoretical framework for the study. The findings in this study showed that the government with the aim to mitigate the spread of the pandemic in the country restricted the movement of its citizens with compulsory sit-at-home, thus affecting the normal life of its citizens, government intervention at the federal, state and local level is grossly inadequate to cushion the effect of the epidemic on the vulnerable citizens of the country, several structural factors helped trigger Nigeria's current economic crises such as poor public health infrastructure, institutional corruption, weak and underdeveloped digital economy, lack of social welfare programme, leadership problem, over-dependent on oil sector of the economy, lack of saving culture and, high debt profile of Nigeria. The paper recommends that government should create an enabling environment to increase the standard of living of its citizens as poverty fuels criminality, the government should not politicize the distribution of relief materials to victims in the face of emergencies, since the protection of the welfare and well-being of the people is the reason for governance, need for good governance and the rule of law, and government should improve capacity-building strategies for adequate security of life and property in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Social Change, Criminality, Culture, and COVID-19 pandemic.*

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### **Background to the Study**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has brought about social change both positively and negatively. Zizek, (2020, p 14) observed that: COVID-19 a result of natural contingency as its purest presented surreal challenges to global community with different degrees of intensity. He further observed that developed nations seems not to bother about those who have died, or those who will eventually die as a result of this pandemic, but they are paying serious attention to the sliding economic fortunes and political uncertainties occasioned by the pandemic (p.14).

Similarly, Ghada and Aseel (2020, p.122) observed that the novel coronavirus called *SARS-CoV2* has attracted considerable attention in the past months, unlike its sisters the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (*MERS*) and Several Acute Respiratory Syndrome (*SARS*) and the disease it causes has been termed "*coronavirus disease 2019*". And its mortality rate is higher which has infected millions and has killed more than hundred thousand of people all over the world.

Empirical evidence available in Nigeria has it that the economic shutdown on the other hand, was triggered by a combination of declining oil price and spillover from the COVID-19 outbreak, which did not only lead to a fall in the demand for oil products but also stopped economic activities from taking place when social distancing policies were enforced (Ozili, 2020, p. 1). Economic crises or recessions are often caused by market correction (Ozili, 2020), market failure, external trade and price shocks, political instability, civil unrest through protests (Grasso and Giugni, 2016; Bernburg, 2016; Bermeo and Bartels, 2014). Recessions are not new in Nigeria (Ozili, 2020, p.2). During the 2016 recession, the monetary authority in Nigeria defended the local currency from forced devaluation against dollar and adopted a managed float foreign exchanged system, which worked well from 2016 to 2019.

Arising from the aftermath effect of COVID-19 pandemic all over the world and Nigeria in particular, in this study we shall examine how COVID-19 has induced social changes and criminality in Nigeria as a result of economic lockdown, restriction on inter-state movement, closure of international borders, social interactions were impaired, restriction of religious worship, restrictions on all forms marital rites such as weddings and traditional marriage, ban on all burial and funeral activities, suspension of all educational activities, social distancing, influx of fake news on social and print media, influx of fake drugs (pills), influx of fake doctors into the country accompanied with fake cures and restriction of all sporting activities in the country among others.

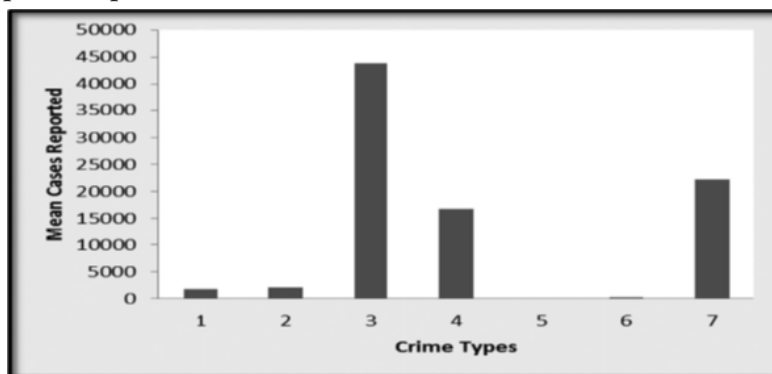
These alterations in human activities have brought about untold hardship to the common man and since survival is key, hence the rise of criminality in the country. Below is the crime statistics helps to buttress the emphasis above.

**Table 1:** Summary statistics of the data set on crime activities in Nigeria

Crime types	Mean	Mode	Sum	Skewness	Kurtosis
Murder	1814.48	1453a	38,104	1.056	0.565
Armed Robbery	2126.19	1064a	44,650	0.058	-1.317
Assault	43890.19	28,925a	921,694	-0.120	-1.271
Felonious Wounding	16667.05	9659a	350,008	1.257	4.317
Manslaughter	33.52	14a	704	0.935	0.074
Bribery and Corruption	208.00	10a	4368	0.878	-0.220
Burglary	22179.10	10,265a	465,761	3.520	14.231

**Source:**(Aristotle, 2019, p.13)

**Figure 1:** Graphical representation of the mean number of the different crime types



**Source:** (Aristotle, 2019, p.14)

### Research Questions

The question is then:

1. How has COVID-19 pandemic induced social change and criminality in Nigeria?
2. What ways can the federal government of Nigeria intervene to mitigate the rise of criminality in Nigeria?
3. In what ways has coronavirus pandemic altered the social interactions and human activities in Nigeria?

This paper is targeted to examine these questions and to chart a new course in the quest for the promotion and speedy government intervention relating to the issue of COVID-19 pandemic and to access how best the rise of criminality can be curtailed in the study area.

### Conceptual Framework

The use of word or language factor has been issue in social science, reasons being that some terms are just like an abstraction. Defining '*social change*' has always been a tricky undertaking. Generally speaking, social change can be seen as something that can be perceived as the differences in the society from one time to another. But defining any concept has always been problematic as there is no universally acceptable definition in classical and social science.

However, we shall attempt an operational definition of the term '*Social Change*'. Ekpenyong (2015), social change refers to structural alternatives: meaning alterations in the patterns of society itself. But it must be pointed out here that any change taking place within culture is denoted as a cultural change. This cultural trait is the emergence of new traits and trait complexes in a culture. Social change is the change in the nature, social institutions, social behavior or social relations of a society. The alteration may occur in norms, values, cultural products and symbols in a society. This alteration in the structure and function of a social system, institutions and patterns of interaction, work, leisure activities, roles and other aspects of society can be altered over the time as a result of the process of social change (Ekpenyong, 2015).

Finally, Social change can be viewed as the transformation of culture and social organization/structure over time. In the modern world, we are aware that society is never static, and that social, political, economic and cultural changes occur constantly. There are a whole range of classic theories and research method available within sociology.

Crime has been defined in various ways De Lisi and Vaughan (2016) defined crime as:

*“Any act or omission prohibited by public law for the protection of the public and punishable by state in a judicial proceeding in its own name.” Similarly, Olumati (2017) defined crime as the “behavior that violates the norms of society” or more simply “antisocial behavior” (p.34). defining crime from the legal standpoint Olumati (2017, p. 36) further see crime as “an intentional violation of criminal law or penal code committed without defense or excuse and penalized by the state”. Dambazau (2007) defined crime as “an instrumental act or omission in violation of criminal law, committed without justification and sanctioned by the state as felony or misdemeanor”. Crime is therefore, a violation of the rules agreed to be respected by all members of the society, and upon which the rest members of the society mete sanctions upon those guilty of the violation (p. 50).*

Again, Clinnard (1974) wrote that crime refers to those activities which break the law of the land and are subject to official punishment after conviction. It has been shown that in Nigeria, criminal act is influenced by societal disposition and psychological instinct that is inherent in man. The Nigerian society places great emphasis on material wealth and as a result, its youths are becoming prone to deviant behavior which is the first step away from the accepted norms of a society or an institution. Types of crime that have been identified range from petty – theft to violent crimes such as assault, kidnapping, burglary, banditry, Fulani herdsmen attack, pipeline vandalism, electoral violence, rape, ritual murder and terrorism (in the most recent times). Violent crimes have been defined as crimes against persons (Aristotle and Okoyen, 2020; Kumar and Borbor, 2018; Esiri, 2016; Ekpenyong, 2015; Igwe and Odiye, 2010; Bernard, Snipes and Gerould, 2010; Igbinovia, 2003; Galvin, 2002; Iwarimie- Jaja, 2000; Schaefer and Lamn, 1995; Dambazau, 1994; Nkpa, 1994; Clinnard 1974).

The behavioral definition of crime focuses on, criminality (Olumati, 2017). To him, criminality has to do with certain personality profile that causes the most alarming sorts of

crimes. All criminal behavior involves the use of force, fraud, or stealth to obtain material or symbolic resources. As Aristotle and Okoyen (2020), further noted that criminality is a style of strategic behavior characterized by self-centeredness, indifference to the suffering and needs of others, and low self-control. More impulsive individuals are more likely to find criminality as an attractive style of behavior because it can provide immediate gratification through relatively easy or simple strategies. These strategies frequently are risky and thrilling, usually requiring little skill or planning. They often result in agony or discomfort for victims and offer few or meager long-term benefits because they interfere with careers, family and friendships (p.29). Aristotle and Okoyen asserts that this means the “within-person causes of truancy are the same as the within-person causes of drug use, aggravated assault, and auto accidents (2020, p.35).

Coronavirus disease (*COVID-19*) is a family of viruses that can cause a range of illnesses in humans including common cold and more severe forms like SARS and MARS which are life-threatening. The virus is named after its shape which takes the form of a crown with protrusion around it and hence is known as coronavirus emerging from Wuhan in China. It is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus; it spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharged from the nose when one infected coughs or sneezes (WHO, 2020).

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Social Changes**

Theory itself according to Nwaenyi and Nwaenyi, (2019) is defined as a hypothesis which has been empirically tested and found to be true. Social change theories are those theories which promote change(s) in the society. This study adopted the conflict theory of change and conspiracy theory of social change.

**Conflict Theory of Change:** According to Ekpenyong (2015) economic theory occurs and produces other changes through the mechanism of testified change between different parts of social change. Recently, theorists have argued that conflict in a general sense, can produce social change. Therefore, conflict theory argues that change is due to conflict between groups or different parts of social and cultural systems. It maintains that conflict between groups A and B can bring about change. The theory is plausible (appearing reasonable or true), but conflict is not a sufficient principle for change. Conflict can be resolved in compromise. This means that conflict, does not bring about any change but may bring about obstruction to change in the society. According to Ekpenyong (2015) for there to be a change, conflict may not be necessary, conflict can sometimes hinder change and may lead to impact and not to bring about change. Conflict is even not a necessary condition for change to occur because there can be change without conflict. Intensified conflict may help to perpetuate boundaries between groups. For example, if groups A and B are in conflict and instead of diminishing, it intensified to the extent that no group crosses to the other for any reason. Then such conflict will perpetuate the boundaries of such groups. Intensified conflict may in itself be the result of change and not the cause of change. The implication is that conflict is a condition for change or change may result to conflict (Igwe and Odike, 2010 p.7). As discussed earlier, intensified conflict may be a necessary condition or cause for change. Conflict can be the cause for change as change can also be the cause for conflict. Nevertheless, this theory is useful because it points

to internal sources of change. It emphasizes that change may come from within or outside the system.

Ekpenyong (2015), further argues that it is the economic structure of society, not the beliefs and values- ideology of its members that provide the basis for conflict and change. “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence; but rather, it is their social existence which determines their consciousness” (Marx, 1969 in Ekpenyong, 2015, p.307). But Marxism itself has become an ideology. Millions of people believe and act in accordance with some parts of the theory. Marxism as an ideology has become a strong force for social change as much as the economic forces that, Marx saw at work. People who believe in the Marxist theory have worked to bring about the change which Marx himself saw as inevitable. Revolutions have been carried out by such groups even through the conditions Marx saw as essential to revolution may sometimes be lacking (Ekpenyong, 2003, p. 308). A hungry man is an angry man, since survival is key and coupled with the total lockdown, criminality is as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Conspiracy Theory of Social Change:** Ghada and Aseel (2020), asserts that according to conspiracy theories, the virus outbreak was as a result of a biological warfare rather than a natural occurrence (p. 123). They noted that people who believe in and promote conspiracy theories on social media do not trust powerful groups who they consider to be withholding information, such as politicians and drug companies. If the public does not maintain trust in governmental organizations, they are less likely to follow any medical advice or procedures. In addition, with the circulation of conspiracy theories, people may be more likely to develop negative attitudes towards interpretations of preventive measures. They may even use dangerous alternatives as treatment, which will most likely increase the possibilities of the virus spreading and thus endangering more lives (p. 123).

Public attitude is extremely relevant to the current spread of conspiracy theories in relation to COVID-19 outbreak. Alternative healing approaches to coronavirus are also being promoted in the social media users like: Twitter, Facebook users have claimed that the virus can be fought by drinking bleach products while others have called for more herbal-based approach for protection, some believe taking alcohol can cure the virus, some believe constant sex can cure the virus. In some countries, calls for national Friday mass prayers have been circulated for protection from the virus (Ghada and Aseel, 2020, p.123). The COVID-19 outbreak has also led to a worldwide increase discrimination and racist attacks targeted at people from one East Asian (p.123).

Conspiracy theories can be detrimental to social peace and harmony, as they can not only influence people's health choices but can also instigate xenophobia in societies triggering violent social behaviors. In Nigeria, violent social behavior like armed robbery, assault, felonious wounding, burglary and other acts of criminality are as a result of the alterations that exist in the normal human life and social interactions.

## **Methodology**

The study is qualitative in nature and therefore relied principally on secondary data to achieve the purpose and scope of the study due to the restriction of movement and total lockdown as declared by the federal government. The sources of the secondary data included publications in form of text books, bulletins, journals, government documents, newspapers and internet. The data were content/ document analyzed and presented thematically. According to Nwaenyi and Nwaenyi (2019, p.18) content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases.

## **Reported Cases of Criminality during COVID-19 Lockdown in Nigeria**

Cases of criminality emanating from COVID-19 shutdown in Nigeria are as follows:

1. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of April, 2020 as reported by THISDAY Online, that suspected hoodlums tagged '*one million boys*' stormed and attacked residents of Oworonshoki, Mushin and Itire community and other parts of the city; they robbed successfully but were repelled by the Rapid Response Squad (RRS) of the Lagos state police command.
2. As reported by Daily- Post on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020, the Delta state police command gunned down a suspected armed robber at Okuzu quarters in Obiaruku community in Ukwuani local government area of Delta state. It was learned that the deceased and suspected members of his gang had operated for hours when the police patrol team stormed the area, weapons recovered were a cut to size locally-made gun, two live cartridges, three expended cartridges and two techno mobile phones at the crime scene.
3. As reported by Al Jazeera, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020, Gunmen stormed a 54-year-old commercial drivers' house in Iju-Ishaga area of Lagos state, they robbed nearby residents, armed with clubs, machetes and iron-rod, ransacking homes, catered away with valuables and injured some residents who put up a fight.
4. Similarly, as reported by Sahara reporters on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020, Ogun state, there were cases of theft, robbery incidents, homes were broken into and food stuff items were forcefully taken away.
5. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, 2020, it was reported that hungry Nigerians attacked and steal from truck carrying bags of rice in broad daylight in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory. This was as a result of the extended lockdown by President Muhammed Buhari, the opposition party; the people's Democratic Party (PDP) tweeted to support this claim as follows:

*In Abuja, watch and see how hungry Nigerians invaded a moving truck to steal food to eat. It's obvious that the so called palliatives from the President Buhari led APC- FG did not reach the people”*

## **Government Intervention to Mitigate the rise of Criminality during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria**

### **i) Monetary and Fiscal Policy Intervention**

The emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic as an unforeseen situation do also serve as a factor of social change in the livelihood of Africans especially Nigerian. This has affected all facets of the social system. Similarly, it is noted that: The government of Nigeria, in response

to the COVID-19 outbreak, the monetary authority, Central bank, said it would provide support to affected households, businesses, regulated financial institutions and other stakeholders to reduce the adverse economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic in the country. The central bank provided support in six (6) avenues. First, it granted extension of loan moratorium on principal repayments from March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Thus, extending any moratorium loans in the country by one full year. Second, it offered interest rate reduction on all intervention loan facilities from 9% to 5% beginning from March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 (Ozili, 2020, p.11). Third, it offered a NGN50bn (equivalent of US\$131.6m) targeted credit facility to hotels, airline service providers, health care merchants, among others. Fourth, it provided credit support to the health care industry to meet the increasing demand for health care services during the outbreak. The loans were available only to pharmaceutical companies and hospitals. Fifth, it provided regulatory forbearance to banks which allow banks to temporarily restructure the tenor of existing loan within specific period of time. For instance, loans in the oil and gas, agricultural and manufacturing sectors of the economy, and. Sixth, it strengthened the loan to deposit ratio (LDR) policy which allowed banks to extend more credit facility to the economy (p.11). On the other hand, the fiscal authorities had to revise the 2020 national budget of N10.59 trillion (US\$28 billion equivalent). The government announced that the budget was reduced by NGN1.5 trillion (US\$4.90 billion equivalent) as part of the measures to respond to the impact of coronavirus on the economy and in response to the oil price crash. The current budget was benchmarked at US\$15 per barrel as at April, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from US\$57 per barrel in previous budgetary estimates.

#### **ii) Relief Materials Distribution Intervention**

As part of government intervention to alleviate the suffering of its citizens during the lockdown, both the federal and state governments has taken the proactive measures to distribute relief material (mostly food items) to the most vulnerable sections of the society like the widow, women, selected house-hold and individuals to benefit from the relief materials distributed. Although, there is bias in the federal government distribution pattern where the north-west, north-central, and north-east benefit more from the N20,000 cash distribution and bags of rice, millets, beans among others at the expense of the south- west, south-east, and south-south region put together. And this has generated a public outcry emanating from this continuous marginalization and victimization.

#### **COVID-19 and Present Day Fashion in Nigeria and the World at large**

With the emergence of coronavirus (COVID-19) which has affected all facets of life, fashion is not left out either. Fashion trends come and go; meanwhile societal values are established and evolving characteristics to their beliefs, morals, value and culture. Fashion as an expression of feeling, present day youth tries to interpret fashion trends and adopt the clothing style that suits their value and traits. Below are the few clips of Nigeria's present COVID-19 fashion trending currently.



Figure 2.



Igwe and Odike (2010) identified the following as the determinants of types of social change in the society:

- i. Social life being structured along time and space: Social activities take place in particular days, months, or years. In the same vein, social activities are organized at particular places for work, worship, eating, sleeping and the likes. Boundaries are created to make distinctions by property rules that structure the possession and use of scarce resources in any society.
- ii. A regular division in the society through social, economic, health and political activities.
- iii. Regulations of violence: While violence is apparently disruptive in another sense, it may be the only language that some government representatives within or outside may hear. It may occur within a short time or it may take a long time to organize and execute.
- iv. Arrangements for sexual reproduction as well as caring for and educating the young ones typified in kinship and marriage relations also take a time period to come about.
- v. System of symbolic communication especially language, structures, are the relations between society's members. These factors need to be developed over years to be effective.
- vi. The accumulation, selection, differentiation of knowledge which is essentially cumulative, the expression of collective knowledge and capabilities beyond a given limit is possible only over a given period. For instance, by selecting and differentiating e.g. growth of technical knowledge, capital accumulation, rising production level or technological knowledge increased population, new problems which generate further innovations occur over a period of time and place.
- vii. The saturation and exhaustion of an area in use over a period of time will necessitate change of place in a certain direction. For example, ecological conditions such as natural resources set limits to population expansion and economic history over a period of time.
- viii. Competition and cooperation between groups or individual, conflict, competition as well as cooperation are all considered as basic determinants of particular kind of social change depending on how long they take to materialize.

- ix. Diffusion of Innovation: This refers to technological inventions, new scientific ideas, beliefs or new habits in terms of leisure, such are possible so far the people are motivated and the innovations do not conflict with vital cultural aspects of the society. This factor also takes time to be understood and accepted.
- x. Planning and institutionalization of change: This refers to goals directed to large scale planning and institutionalizing resultant changes. Although, some unplanned changes are of large-scale and command institutionalization, the process of planning and institutionalization is not a one day affairs (p. 11- 12).

### **Factors of Social Change**

Social scientists have identified various factors that had helped to stimulate social and cultural changes in the past. Some of these factors include physical resources, population growth, ideology and individual leadership. But it must be emphasized that it is rare, if ever possible to explain socio-culture change simply in terms of one explanatory variable. As Ekpenyong (2015) has warned:

*“No claim that social change is 'determined' by economic interests, ideas, personalities of particular individuals, geographical conditions and so on, is acceptable. All such single factor theories belong to the kindergarten stage of social sciences development. Any single factor is always inter-dependent with several others” (p.303).*

The above quotation suggests that there is always a complexity of factors influencing the direction and pattern of change. There is always interplay of forces at work. Change in one part of a system invariably affects other parts and the results may be unforeseen. The present global COVID-19 pandemic as an unforeseen situation do also serves as a factor of social change.

### **Resistance to Social Change**

The word 'change' is likely synonymous to development, although, change could be positive or negative depending on the individual reaction(s) (Ekpenyong, 2015; Igwe and Odike, 2010; Ekpenyong, 1992).

With the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic, there seem to be some resistance to the change accompanied corona virus. For instance, social distancing, economic lockdown, restriction of religious worship among others. Ekpenyong (2015) observed that new ideas, new scientific and technical developments, and new patterns of social life are sometimes resisted even in the rapidly changing societies. There are several reasons for resisting change. The new way conflict with traditional values and beliefs, the change may be costly in terms of money; people may feel frightened or threatened or the new form may conflict with their habits. Resistance to change is relatively common in social life. Vested interest in status quo, opposing values and goals, alteration, perceived intolerable consequences and sheer human inertia are other factors that commonly give rise to opposing forces that may succeed in limiting or blocking social change (p.323). Ekpenyong (2015) further observed that: *“in many cases, vested interest can work to forestall changes”*. Sometimes fear can play an important role in individual resistance to innovation. Fear is also involved in resistance to changes that threaten people with the loss of status, income, or power.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, change comes in so many forms and rates and is a pervasive phenomenon in social life. The impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on Africa at large and Nigeria in particular has been devastating and thus given rise to criminality. The study showed that the government with the plan to mitigate the spread of the epidemic in the country restricted the movement of its citizens with the compulsory sit-at-home executive order, thus affecting the normal lives of the people in the country, Moreover, it was also revealed that in view of this global pandemic, government intervention both at the federal, state and local level is grossly inadequate to cushion the effect of the epidemic on the vulnerable citizens of the country. Several structural factors helped triggered Nigeria's current economic crises namely: (i) Poor public health infrastructure, (ii) Institutional corruption, (iii) A weak and underdeveloped digital economy, (iv) Lack of social welfare programme, (v) Leadership problem, (vi) Over-dependent on oil sector of the economy, (vii) Lack of saving culture and, (viii) High debt profile of Nigeria. The study further noted that the spill-over of COVID-19 epidemic in the country is coupled with the declining oil price in the global market among others, thus the nation need a strong policy framework to control the issue.

## **Recommendations**

In view of the above findings, the following recommendations are hereby offered: Government should as a matter of urgency build and equip existing hospital around the country with the state of the art health facilities that can handle global pandemic such as COVID-19 in the near future, government should create an enabling environment to increase the standard of living of Nigerians as poverty fuels criminality, the government should not politicalize the distribution of relief materials to victims in the face of emergencies, as the protection of the welfare and well-being of the people is the reason for governance, need for good governance and the rule of law, the government should improve capacity-building strategies for adequate security of life and property in Nigeria, In this era of internal security challenges, efforts should be made to uncover the root cause of insecurity and when found, such factors be addressed squarely, the welfare needs of the citizens must be made an object of national security instead of the state, its institutions and regime protection.

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