

A POST-MORTEM ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC ORDER IN NIGERIA**Peter Archibong Essoh**Department of Sociology and Anthropology
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University of Uyo, Nigeria**Abstract**

Nigeria was seriously affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had far-reaching consequences across its economic, social and institutional spheres. The crisis exposed and deepened longstanding structural weaknesses, including an underfunded healthcare system, an oil-dependent and fragile economy, widespread poverty and inadequate social protection mechanisms. These vulnerabilities were further compounded by the government's limited capacity to respond effectively. Public order deteriorated amid rising public frustration, enforcement challenges and mistrust in state institutions. This paper presented a post-mortem analysis of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic development and public order in Nigeria. It was guided by the assumption of Martha Albertson Fineman's Vulnerability Theory developed in 2019. The paper relied on qualitative methods using documentary evidence (analysis of secondary data from textbooks, journals, periodicals, government publications and internet sources) and content analysis was used to analyse the secondary data. The results showed that COVID-19 disrupted the economy, educational system, healthcare system and public order in Nigeria. It was recommended, among others, that the government should focus on reviving the economy through stimulus packages, support for small businesses and job creation initiatives. Policies that could put strains on Nigerians and surviving businesses should be avoided to avoid economic hardship. Investments should also be made into strengthening healthcare infrastructure while ensuring that essential healthcare services continue unhindered during crises. Medical personnel should be encouraged to work in Nigeria. This research contributed to a better understanding of how pandemics can exacerbate existing social challenges within a developing country context. Moreover, analysis into the impact of COVID-19 on public order in Nigeria provides valuable insights into how disruptions such as lockdowns and restrictions can strain law enforcement capabilities, exacerbate tensions within communities, affect crime rates and compromise social stability.

Keywords: *Post-Mortem Analysis, COVID-19 Pandemic, Socio-Economic Development, Public Order*

Introduction

The Coronavirus Disease, otherwise called COVID-19, originated in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China, in December 2019. Following its rapid global spread, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared it a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (Usman *et al.*, 2024; Okorie *et al.*, 2022; Inegbedion, 2021). Asangausung *et al.* (2022) noted that the pandemic caught the world unprepared, resulting in widespread mortality, economic paralysis and the closure of numerous businesses, with severe ripple effects, including a rise in crime. The crisis laid bare the fragility of healthcare systems across Africa, Nigeria included, highlighting critical gaps in healthcare infrastructure, medical research, access to essential services and public health preparedness. Ironically, contrary to Western projections that Africa would be most devastated by the pandemic, the continent, including Nigeria, proved relatively resilient in terms of infection and mortality rates, though the socioeconomic consequences were extensive.

Economically, the pandemic inflicted unprecedented disruption. Usman *et al.* (2024), Inegbedion (2021), Agbeyo (2020) and Joan *et al.* (2022) submitted that a significant proportion of businesses in Nigeria experienced closures, reduced operating hours, rising operational costs and workforce downsizing. Inegbedion (2021) emphasised that approximately 40 million small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), which are critical to youth employment in Nigeria, were severely affected by restrictions and economic slowdown. The consequences were evident in the labour market. Adebimpe *et al.* (2021) noted that unemployment among youths aged 15–34 surged to 30.1% in the fourth quarter of 2020, up from 26.7% in the previous quarter, primarily due to the shutdown of economic activities. This aligns with the findings of Alex and Obinachiwori (2020), who observed that the economic fallout forced many businesses to shut down or place employees on unpaid standby, thus deepening financial distress for families and dependents.

Beyond the economic implications, the pandemic also had serious repercussions for public safety and the rule of law. The United Nations (2020) warned of a potentially massive impact on crime, security and justice systems. Supporting this claim, Asangausung *et al.* (2022) and Okorie *et al.* (2022) documented a notable increase in organised crime during the pandemic, underscoring how crisis conditions can fuel insecurity and erode public order. In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic was not merely a health emergency—it was a complex, multidimensional crisis that reshaped Nigeria's socioeconomic and institutional landscape. Against this background, the paper presented a post-mortem analysis of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic development and public order in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the most disruptive global crises in recent history, generating widespread effects on public health, economic stability, education and social order. In Nigeria, the pandemic exacerbated existing structural weaknesses, including a fragile healthcare system, high unemployment, entrenched poverty, underfunded educational infrastructure and limited institutional resilience. Lockdowns and movement restrictions significantly disrupted economic activity, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), while millions of Nigerians—particularly those in the informal sector—lost their jobs or suffered salary reductions. The education sector faced severe setbacks due to prolonged school closures and limited access to digital learning technologies, which exposed a deep digital divide. The healthcare system became overwhelmed, plagued by shortages in infrastructure, medical personnel and essential supplies, while frontline workers endured both physical and psychological stress. Public safety and order also deteriorated,

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as incidents of civil unrest, police abuses, rising criminality and cyber-related offences became more pronounced during and after the lockdowns.

Although numerous studies examined the sector-specific consequences of the pandemic, such as its impact on healthcare (Akinyemi *et al.*, 2021), the economy (Usman *et al.*, 2024) and education (Okagbue *et al.*, 2023), few provided a comprehensive, interdisciplinary evaluation of how the pandemic simultaneously affected multiple sectors of Nigeria's development and public order. Even more limited was the application of Martha Albertson Fineman's Vulnerability Theory as an analytical lens. This theory, which frames vulnerability as a universal yet unequally distributed condition, offered critical insight into the preparedness and responsiveness of institutions. Yet, its potential to illuminate how structural inequalities shaped pandemic outcomes in Nigeria remained largely unexplored in academic literature.

Most of the existing literature treated the pandemic's effects in isolation—focusing on economic decline, health system overload or educational disruption, without linking these to broader questions of social inequality, institutional fragility, or the uneven distribution of resilience. There was also insufficient analysis of how the crisis deepened structural vulnerabilities in a country already grappling with governance challenges, weak public health systems and a lack of effective social protection mechanisms. Furthermore, the experiences of the most affected populations such as low-income households, informal workers, women and youth—were rarely examined through the vulnerability framework, which could have better explained the disproportionate impact and varied coping capacities.

This study therefore conducted a post-mortem, multidisciplinary analysis of the socio-economic and public order impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria, using Vulnerability Theory as its theoretical guide. It critically examined the interconnected disruptions in the economy, healthcare, education and security sectors to assess how institutional weaknesses and unequal access to resilience-shaping resources influenced Nigeria's pandemic experience. The aim was to uncover the underlying drivers of the crisis's impact and to offer recommendations for building more inclusive and resilient systems capable of withstanding future shocks.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to present a post-mortem analysis of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic development and public order in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. investigate the extent to which COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Nigeria's economic activities;
- ii. assess the impact of the pandemic on the country's healthcare system;
- iii. analyse how COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing challenges in Nigeria's educational sector; and
- iv. examine the influence of the pandemic on public order and social stability in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following questions:

- i. In what ways did COVID-19 pandemic disrupt Nigeria's economy?
- ii. What impact did the pandemic have on the Nigerian healthcare system?
- iii. How did COVID-19 pandemic aggravate educational difficulties in Nigeria?
- iv. In what ways did the pandemic affect public order in Nigeria?

Conceptualisation and Literature Review**Concept of COVID-19 Pandemic**

COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus disease 2019, is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. It was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China and has since spread globally, leading to a pandemic. COVID-19 can cause symptoms ranging from mild to severe and can lead to complications such as pneumonia and respiratory failure. Common symptoms include fever, cough and difficulty breathing. The virus spreads primarily through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes and can also be transmitted by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus. The word post-mortem, refers to a review or analysis conducted after the occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic in order to evaluate its outcomes and identify lessons learned for future improvement.

Concept of Public Order

In the context of criminal justice, public order is the preservation of social harmony and peace (McKee, 2023). It is an all-encompassing term that covers a wide range of social stability-related topics, such as crime prevention, public protest management, law enforcement and property protection. The idea of social contract theory, which maintains that people in society give up some liberties and freedoms in return for the safety and security that the government provides, is closely related to the idea of public order. Since it guarantees that people can live their lives without fear of violence, chaos, or disorder, public order is an essential part of the social contract in this context.

Public order is maintained in the criminal justice system through a number of strategies, including the application of law enforcement organisations like the police, the courts and the prison system. The police are in charge of preventing and identifying crime, catching criminals and upholding law and order on the streets. The penal system is in charge of punishing those who break the law, while the judiciary is in charge of interpreting and applying it. Preventing crime is one of the most important parts of upholding public order. This includes a variety of tasks, such as intelligence collection, community policing and proactive law enforcement tactics like stop-and-search authority and surveillance camera use. Effective crime prevention measures are critical to ensuring that citizens feel safe and secure in their communities.

Another crucial element of maintaining public order in the context of criminal justice is the control of public protests. Although they are a necessary component of democracy, demonstrations can also lead to stress and conflict. In order to keep protests peaceful and prevent them from upsetting the peace, the police are essential. Upholding public order also depends on the enforcement of the law. Laws are made to make sure that people and institutions act in ways that are in line with social norms and values. By looking into, prosecuting and punishing those who violate these laws, the

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criminal justice system is in charge of upholding them. Lastly, the protection of public order depends on the protection of public property. Buildings, infrastructure and other assets owned by the public or the government are considered public property. The criminal justice system is in charge of making sure that these resources are shielded from harm or devastation.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Disruption

Usman *et al.* (2024) interrogated the political economy of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on socio-economic development in Nigeria between 2019 and 2022. The paper relied on qualitative methods using documentary research methods (analysis of secondary data from Nigeria's Bureau of Statistics, the Central Bank of Nigeria, the NCDC report, the World Bank/IMF post-COVID-19 report, ECOWAS, the AU, WHO reports and reputable journals). Findings revealed, among others, that Nigeria, being a revenue economy, suffered greatly from COVID-19 because it affected the economy's development, diaspora remittance and the health status of the nation due to the fall in oil prices, the shutdown of businesses and the inflation of goods and services. On the positive side, the coronavirus-induced public health crisis provided a chance for many state governments to implement long-term public health reforms.

Joan *et al.* (2022) examined the implication of COVID-19 pandemic on the sustainability of small and micro entrepreneur business in the informal sector in Nigeria with specific focus on Ose market in Onitsha, Anambra State. The study specifically analysed the effect of COVID-19 on informal SME, extent of risk and vulnerability and how small and micro businesses were sustained within the period of pandemic. Multi-stage, purposive and random sampling techniques were used in selecting 150 small and micro businesses in the informal sector in Onitsha from which data used for the study were collected. Primary data were collected using questionnaire. The study revealed that COVID-19 exerted significant effect on small and medium scale entrepreneurs in the informal sector and that small and medium scale businesses were vulnerable to risk orchestrated by COVID-19 pandemic.

Inegbedion (2021) examined the impact of COVID-19 on economic growth in Nigeria: Opinions and attitudes. The purpose was to ascertain respondents' perception of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic growth in Nigeria. The cross-sectional survey research design was employed and a mix-method was used in collecting the research data. Content validity index and face validity served to validate the research instrument while Cronbach alpha was used to assure its reliability. The secondary data were analysed using percentage changes while the primary data were analysed using a one-sample t-test and least-squares method. Results indicated that the COVID-19-induced lockdown has significantly constrained economic activities and the circular flow of income. Lastly, the perceived reduction in the circular flow of income in the wake of the COVID-19 lockdown has negatively impacted economic growth in Nigeria.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Healthcare System

Akinyemi *et al.* (201) appraised the readiness and resilience of the Nigerian health system to the COVID-19 pandemic, using Oyo State in southwest Nigeria, as a case study. This study was a cross-sectional qualitative study involving key informant and in-depth interviews. Purposive sampling was used in recruiting participants who were members of the Task Force on COVID-19 in the state and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) members (physicians, nurses, laboratory

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scientists, "contact tracers", logistic managers) and other partners. The state's health system response to COVID 19 was assessed using the WHO health systems framework. Audio recordings of the interviews done in English were transcribed and thematic analysis of these transcripts was carried out using NVIVO software. Results showed that the state government responded promptly by putting in place measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the response was not adequate owing to the fact that the health system has already been weakened by various challenges like poor funding of the health system, shortage of human resources and inadequate infrastructure. These contributed to the health system's sub-optimal response to the pandemic.

Momoh and Amaha (2021) examined the implications of poor management of health systems in Nigeria on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This study relied on secondary data obtained from books, journals and internet sources. Besides, content analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The study argued that health facilities in Nigeria have been put under intense pressure due to the increasing demand for health assistance by Nigerians during the COVID-19, thereby limiting the performance of the limited numbers of health facilities that were hitherto inadequate. Moreover, poor infrastructural development in the health sector and corruption had been identified as causes of the poor performance of the Nigeria health sector.

Ayeni and Aborisade (2021) assessed the scourge of COVID-19 in the context of Nigeria's orthodox healthcare facilities and professionals, the challenges and lessons for the future using the International-Health-Regulations (IHR) Preparedness-framework. He assessment involved gauging the performance of selected indexes namely detect, report, respond, enabling-function and operational-readiness of Lagos-State healthcare facilities. The IHR for State Party self-assessment annual reporting (IHR-SPAR) tool was adapted into a questionnaire via Google-form and the link generated was shared on the WhatsApp-platform of the healthcare-workers of randomly selected healthcare facilities in the three Senatorial-Districts of the State. A total of 210 respondents were targeted for COVID-19 related information but only 157 responded. The data obtained were processed using arithmetic-mean as suggested by the adopted methodology. Findings showed that Lagos-State has a level-3 capacity across the five-indexes which include detect-capacity (41.94%), report-capacity (45.41%), respond-capacity (45.77%), enabling-function (45.99%) and operational-readiness (44.78%). Findings also revealed that some of the challenges encountered in managing COVID-19 are perennial.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Education

Okagbue *et al.* (2023) explored the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Nigeria's education system and in the process provided a distinctive solution to the challenges facing the sustainability of education in the country. A cross-sectional approach was applied through an online survey to obtain data from n = 82 learners across the three levels of institutions. SPSS was used to analyse the demographic data, while SMART PLS was used for structural equation modeling (SEM). The results showed that the closure of schools for over six months at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability of schools to engage learners in educational activities while at home also revealed the poor state of the education system in the country, which led to the discovery of the unavailability of distance online education, web-based learning system and ICT infrastructure in the Nigerian education environment. The incidence of COVID-19 also impacted the stability of the academic calendar, caused teachers attrition, increased the rate of student dropout and lack of interest in digital education. These outcomes resulted in the exploration of students' and teachers' perceptions, attitudes, literacy, competency and willingness to engage in distance online education.

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The study outcome satisfied the objectives of the study that the lack of student-teacher digital competencies influences their perception and acceptability of web-based learning approach and use of smart learning and teaching devices.

Ndejjo *et al.* (2023) examined the consequences of school closures due to COVID-19 across four Sub-Saharan African countries: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda. As a qualitative study, the key informants included policymakers, school heads, students, parents, civil society representatives and local leaders. Interview transcripts were thematically analysed. Across the four countries, schools were totally closed for 120 weeks and partially closed for 48 weeks. School closures led to: (i) Desirable and anticipated consequences: enhanced adoption of online platforms and mass media for learning and increased involvement of parents in their children's education. (ii) Desirable and unanticipated consequences: improvement in information, communication and technology (ICT) infrastructure in schools, development and improvement of computer skills and created an opportunity to take leave from hectic schedules. (iii) Undesirable anticipated consequences: inadequate education continuity among students, an adjustment in academic schedules and programmes and disrupted student progress and grades. (iv) Undesirable and unanticipated: increase in sexual violence including engaging in transactional sex, a rise in teenage pregnancy and school dropouts, demotivation of teachers due to reduced incomes and reduced school revenues. (v) Neutral consequences: engagement in revenue-generating activities, increased access to phones and computers among learners and promoted less structured learning. The consequences of school closures for COVID-19 control were largely negative with the potential for both short-term and far-reaching longer-term consequences. In future pandemics, careful consideration of the type and duration of education closure measures and examination of their potential consequences in the short and long term is important before deploying them.

Dessy *et al.* (2021) analysed the impact of COVID-19's lockdown measures on children's school resilience. Using an individual fixed-effect linear probability model on Nigeria data, the quasi-randomness of these measures was used to estimate their effect on school attendance after the lockdown was lifted. Results showed that COVID-19 lockdown measures reduced children's school attendance probabilities after the school system's reopening. Importantly, the negative impact increases with children's age, reaching its peak among those whose education is no longer compulsory. For schoolchildren in that age group, the negative effect of COVID-19 lockdown measures were likely to be permanent, which, if not reversed, may undermine the quality of the economy-wide future labour force. It was also found that COVID-19 pandemic increased child marriage and gender inequality in education among children aged 12 and 18 years in North-Western part of Nigeria.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Public Order

Akanmu *et al.* (2021) examined COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity in Nigeria. Convenience accidental sampling was used to administer 1671 copies of questionnaire on residents through an online/electronic survey. Data collected were analysed descriptively and inferentially. Findings revealed that the spike in crime during the COVID-19 lockdown period is relatively higher than usual with disruption of public peace, theft and rape accounting for the most prominent crime. Meanwhile, most respondents experienced crime incidence between 6 pm and 12 midnight. Ironically, idleness, poor spatial arrangement/planning, poor governance and poverty were the major catalysts for the crime spike during the lockdown, while fear-of-fear (phobophobia) and declined socio-economic capacity were predominant effects of crime experienced. The Fisher's exact test results revealed a significant relationship between the surge in crime and COVID-19-

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restrictive measures. The study concluded that the insecurity during lockdown periods caused both temporary and permanent physical and psychological havoc.

Asangaung *et al.* (2022) examined the activities of cybercriminals during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Secondary and primary data were collected through an online poll from internet users. Extensive explanations and content analysis were conducted. The results demonstrated that during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, internet fraudsters took advantage of the public via phishing schemes, malicious websites, malicious apps, malware, hacking, spam, false information and counterfeit items. Also, many social media users were victims of cybercrime as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly those who were frantic to register online in order to receive government palliatives and other relief materials.

Shodunke (2022) explored citizens' compliance with the order and how its enforcement occasioned illegal police practices in Nigeria. With a qualitative approach, this study recruited 90 participants using varieties of sampling methods to understand public behaviour and police conduct in the enforcement of the order. From the insights gathered with a semi-structured interview and analysed with the thematic analysis method, the study observed that economic hardship, unavoidable matters from the citizens' end and mistrust of authorities, fueled non-compliance. Such mistrust amplified misinformation during the pandemic. Although there was a reasonable level of compliance, the pre-existing police illegalities (extortion and bribery) facilitated the cases of non-compliance in Nigeria. Also, hostility ensued between police personnel and citizens during the enforcement of the lockdown.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was anchored on Martha Albertson Fineman's Vulnerability Theory, developed in 2019 as a critical response to traditional liberal legal frameworks that overemphasise individual autonomy and self-sufficiency. Originating from the field of law, Fineman's theory has since evolved into a broad socio-legal and policy-oriented framework, offering insight into how inequality, marginalisation and institutional failure exacerbate human suffering in times of crisis. Central to this theory is the recognition that vulnerability is a universal, constant and inevitable feature of the human condition—affecting everyone at different life stages or under varying circumstances such as illness, aging, or economic hardship. However, while vulnerability itself is universal, the degree to which individuals experience or withstand it is uneven and shaped by the strength or weakness of societal institutions such as healthcare, education, social protection and the legal system.

Fineman argues that resilience to vulnerability is not a purely personal attribute but a function of the support systems individuals can access. Those with better access to institutional resources are more likely to be protected from the worst effects of crises, while others remain exposed and at risk. This inequality of resilience underscores the theory's core critique of liberal individualism by emphasising that the burden of overcoming vulnerability should not fall solely on individuals. Instead, Vulnerability Theory asserts that the state has a fundamental responsibility to design and maintain institutions that protect all citizens and foster collective resilience. In this way, the theory shifts the focus from autonomy to shared responsibility, insisting that societies must be structured in ways that recognise and respond to the inevitable vulnerabilities of human life. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant in analysing the COVID-19 pandemic's effects, as it highlights the disparities in access to institutional support and the role of government in mitigating or exacerbating public hardship.

Vulnerability Theory provides a compelling framework for understanding how the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected various segments of society and disrupted socio-economic development and public order, particularly in Nigeria. The pandemic exposed deep structural inequalities, demonstrating that certain social groups—such as low-income earners, informal sector workers, women and children—were far more susceptible to the economic and health shocks it triggered. These populations lacked access to adequate healthcare, social safety nets and financial buffers, making them more vulnerable to job losses, food insecurity and illness. While more privileged individuals could rely on savings, private healthcare and remote work, the less privileged bore the brunt of lockdowns and economic stagnation.

The pandemic also underscored the critical role of healthcare and social institutions in cushioning populations from systemic shocks. However, the Nigerian healthcare system's limited capacity and the often-inefficient distribution of government palliatives and cash transfers highlighted the state's inability to adequately protect its citizens. Vulnerability Theory posits that resilient institutions are essential for mitigating the effects of crises and where such structures are weak or poorly managed, vulnerability is exacerbated.

Inequalities in access to technology and education became more pronounced during lockdowns, with wealthier families able to sustain educational continuity and work productivity, while poorer households faced educational disruption, unemployment and elevated health risks. This divergence reflects the theory's emphasis on pre-existing social and economic disparities that shape people's ability to withstand crises.

Furthermore, the Nigerian state's response to the pandemic, marked by inefficiencies, lack of transparency and perceived neglect of vulnerable populations, heightened social frustration. The outbreak of the #End SARS protests, although rooted in broader issues of police brutality and governance failure, was also fuelled by widespread disillusionment over the state's management of pandemic-induced hardships. This civil unrest illustrates how increased vulnerability, when left unaddressed, can escalate into public disorder. As criminality rose alongside unemployment and economic desperation, the link between socio-economic vulnerability and declining public order became more evident. Vulnerability Theory helps explain this pattern by showing how unmet basic needs can lead to increased social tensions, instability and a breakdown of lawful behaviour.

In the long term, the pandemic has reversed gains in poverty reduction, employment and inequality, underscoring the fragile nature of Nigeria's socio-economic development. According to Vulnerability Theory, these outcomes are not merely consequences of the virus but of systemic failures to build inclusive, protective and resilient social structures capable of withstanding shocks. Thus, the theory reinforces the urgent need for proactive policy measures aimed at reducing structural vulnerabilities and strengthening institutions to better manage future crises and support sustainable development.

The application of Vulnerability Theory to explain the impact of COVID-19 on socio-economic development and public order in Nigeria is both insightful and contextually appropriate, yet not without limitations. A key strength of the theory lies in its emphasis on structural inequalities and the differentiated capacity of individuals and communities to absorb shocks. This makes it particularly effective in analysing why certain populations—such as informal workers, low-income households and marginalised groups—were disproportionately affected by the pandemic's

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economic, health and social disruptions. By foregrounding the role of weak institutions and inadequate safety nets, the theory offers a compelling explanation for the widespread hardships, rising crime rates and civil unrest observed during and after the lockdown periods.

However, a critique of this approach is that while Vulnerability Theory adeptly identifies disparities in exposure and resilience, it often underplays the role of individual agency, cultural context and informal support networks, all of which shaped survival strategies during the crisis in Nigeria. Additionally, the theory tends to frame vulnerability in somewhat deterministic terms, assuming that structural disadvantage always leads to worse outcomes, whereas in some cases, community-based solidarity and adaptive behaviors helped mitigate the impact of the pandemic in ways not fully captured by the theory. Furthermore, the theory may fall short in accounting for political dynamics, such as elite manipulation of palliative distribution and public disillusionment with governance, which also contributed to public disorder and social discontent.

Despite these limitations, the justification for adopting Vulnerability Theory in this context remains strong. It provides a valuable analytical lens for understanding the uneven impact of the pandemic, highlighting how structural weaknesses and policy failures intensified public suffering and destabilised social order. Its focus on institutional responsibility and social protection aligns with the pressing need to reform governance and build resilience in vulnerable populations. By directing attention to the systemic roots of crisis-induced inequality and unrest, the theory serves as a powerful tool for advocating policy interventions aimed at social justice, inclusive development and stronger institutional responses in the face of future public health emergencies.

Materials and Methods

This paper employed a qualitative research method, which is most suitable for exploring complex social phenomena such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic development and public order. The study relied primarily on documentary evidence, utilising a wide range of secondary data sources to gather relevant and reliable information. These sources included academic textbooks, peer-reviewed articles, scholarly periodicals, official government reports and publications, policy documents and credible internet-based materials such as organisational reports and online databases.

The rationale for choosing secondary data was based on the availability of extensive existing literature and documentation on the COVID-19 pandemic, its socio-economic implications, public policy responses and the application of social theories in analysing vulnerability. The data collected provided historical, conceptual and empirical insights necessary to support a thorough theoretical analysis.

To interpret the collected data, the study adopted content analysis as the main analytical technique. Content analysis involves the systematic examination and interpretation of textual data to identify patterns, themes and meanings relevant to the research objectives. This approach enabled the researcher to critically evaluate how different populations were affected by the pandemic, assess the performance of institutions and link observed social dynamics to the explanatory framework of Vulnerability Theory. By organising data around central concepts such as inequality, institutional response, resilience and public disorder, the content analysis provided a coherent structure for drawing conclusions and offering informed recommendations. Overall, the combination of documentary analysis and content analysis ensured that the study was grounded in existing

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knowledge while allowing for a reflective and theory-driven interpretation of the pandemic's multifaceted impacts in the Nigerian context.

Results

Findings from this study affirm that the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a global public health crisis but also a profound disruptor of socio-economic development and public order in Nigeria. Empirical evidence gathered from secondary data sources reveals that the pandemic significantly exacerbated Nigeria's pre-existing structural vulnerabilities. These include an already fragile healthcare system, high levels of unemployment, systemic poverty, limited digital and educational infrastructure and weak public institutions. Lockdown measures, though necessary to control the virus, had severe economic implications, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) leading to widespread business closures, job losses and income insecurity, especially in the informal sector which employs a large portion of the population.

The education sector suffered considerably, as the abrupt shift to remote learning exposed a pronounced digital divide. Many students, particularly in rural and low-income urban areas, lacked the tools and internet access needed to continue their education. Similarly, the healthcare system was overwhelmed, with shortages in beds, medical equipment and personal protective equipment (PPE), while frontline health workers reported burnout, anxiety and inadequate institutional support.

Social and public order also deteriorated during the crisis. Findings reveal an uptick in cybercrime, domestic violence and opportunistic criminal behaviour during lockdowns. Civil unrest, such as the #End SARS protests, gained momentum as public frustration with poor governance, inequality and policing practices intensified. Law enforcement responses to lockdowns were at times marked by brutality and extortion, undermining public trust in institutions.

Discussion of Findings**COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Disruption**

The findings of this study reveal that the economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria was both severe and multidimensional, affecting small and medium enterprises (SMEs), increasing unemployment, destabilising supply chains and testing the capacity of government interventions. These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Usman *et al.* (2024), Joan *et al.* (2022) and Inegbedion (2021), who emphasised that the pandemic compounded Nigeria's pre-existing structural economic weaknesses. When analysed through the lens of Structural Theory and Vulnerability Theory, the disruption is better understood not merely as the outcome of an unforeseen health crisis but as a consequence of deeper systemic fragilities that rendered Nigeria's economy particularly susceptible to shocks.

Small businesses, which form the backbone of Nigeria's informal economy and contribute significantly to employment, were among the most severely affected. Due to prolonged lockdowns, reduced consumer demand and limited access to financial relief, many SMEs shut down or drastically scaled back operations. This led to widespread job losses and income insecurity. Vulnerability Theory explains that informal sector workers, who make up a significant portion of Nigeria's labour force, lacked adequate social protection and access to credit, making them disproportionately vulnerable to economic shocks. Unlike formal workers, those in the informal economy could not rely on unemployment benefits or health insurance, compounding their precarity.

The research also indicates a surge in unemployment, particularly among youth and unskilled labour, which intensified economic hardship. According to Structural Theory, this outcome reflects Nigeria's labour market rigidities and under-diversification. Even before the pandemic, the economy was heavily reliant on oil exports and plagued by underemployment, particularly in rural areas. COVID-19 merely amplified these structural imbalances. The closure of businesses in the hospitality, education, transport and service sectors, along with reductions in foreign investment and remittances, caused significant economic contraction. As observed globally by the ILO (2020), workers in lower-tier occupations without job security or the ability to work remotely were the first to lose income—a pattern mirrored in Nigeria.

Supply chain disruptions further complicated economic recovery. Nigeria's dependency on imported raw materials, machinery and finished goods made the economy highly susceptible to international trade shocks. Factory closures, port delays and currency fluctuations affected the availability and pricing of goods. Food supply chains were especially impacted due to mobility restrictions and reduced agricultural labour, leading to inflation in food prices and increased household food insecurity. Structural Theory suggests that such disruptions are the result of inadequate domestic production capacities and overreliance on external markets—symptoms of a weak industrial base.

Government responses to the economic crisis included cash transfers, payroll support for SMEs and credit facilities through the Central Bank of Nigeria. However, these efforts were limited in reach, often criticised for delays, lack of transparency and inadequate targeting. Vulnerability Theory underscores that policy inefficiencies during crises disproportionately affect marginalised populations, especially when public institutions lack the capacity or will to implement inclusive and accountable economic relief programs. Additionally, Nigeria's rising public debt and declining revenues from oil exports further constrained its ability to sustain robust stimulus programs compared to developed economies.

While digitalisation and remote work emerged globally as adaptive strategies during the pandemic, in Nigeria, this shift only accentuated existing socio-economic inequalities. Digital platforms became vital for education, commerce and communication, yet the digital divide—characterised by poor internet infrastructure, limited access to devices and low digital literacy—meant that many Nigerians, especially in rural areas, were excluded from the benefits of the digital economy. The accelerated global shift to online services thus created both opportunities and exclusions, revealing structural weaknesses in Nigeria's technological readiness.

The pandemic also contributed to broader financial instability, exposing vulnerabilities in Nigeria's macroeconomic environment. Oil price volatility led to foreign exchange instability, inflation and reduced fiscal buffers. This reinforced Nigeria's dependence on volatile external revenue sources, as articulated in the Structuralist development literature, which critiques mono-economies for their susceptibility to global market swings. As unemployment rose and consumer demand weakened, poverty levels also climbed, reversing gains in social development indicators.

The economic inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic also deepened the class divide. While wealthier individuals and businesses were better positioned to absorb the shocks or pivot to online services, low-income households were left without sufficient safety nets. These disparities reflect

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what Vulnerability Theory identifies as uneven resilience capacities—where one's socioeconomic position determines exposure to harm and the ability to recover.

In conclusion, the economic disruption caused by COVID-19 in Nigeria cannot be viewed in isolation from the structural and institutional vulnerabilities that predated the crisis. The pandemic exposed deep-rooted fragilities in Nigeria's economic model, labour market and governance systems. Using Vulnerability Theory as interpretive frameworks, this study affirms that the groups most affected by the crisis were those already living with precarity and the capacity of the state to mitigate these effects was constrained by institutional inefficiencies and limited fiscal space. The findings call for a long-term rethinking of economic resilience in Nigeria, one that involves diversifying the economy, expanding the social safety net, strengthening local production systems and addressing digital inequality to foster inclusive recovery and future shock resistance.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Healthcare System

The COVID-19 pandemic exerted immense pressure on Nigeria's already fragile healthcare system, laying bare systemic weaknesses in infrastructure, access and workforce capacity. From a Vulnerability Theory perspective, the pandemic did not merely create new problems—it illuminated and intensified the existing structural inequities that shaped Nigerians' uneven exposure to risk and limited their capacity for resilience. Vulnerability Theory, which emphasises how pre-existing social, economic and institutional factors compound harm during crises, provides a compelling lens for understanding the multifaceted health system failures experienced during the pandemic. These findings are consistent with the works of Akinyemi *et al.* (2021), Momoh and Amaha (2021) and Ayeni and Aborisade (2021), all of whom identified the pandemic as a magnifying glass for Nigeria's longstanding healthcare deficiencies.

One of the most critical outcomes of the pandemic was the overwhelming of healthcare facilities. Hospitals across Nigeria, particularly those in urban centers, were inundated with COVID-19 patients during peak periods, despite already contending with limited capacity and inadequate equipment. Intensive Care Units (ICUs) were few and under-resourced and many patients could not access ventilators or oxygen. This strain was worsened by chronic shortages of medical supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), diagnostic tools and pharmaceuticals. These deficits stemmed not only from global supply chain disruptions but also from years of underinvestment in local health manufacturing and procurement systems. In line with Vulnerability Theory, these systemic shortcomings rendered the healthcare system incapable of absorbing the shock of the pandemic, disproportionately affecting poorer communities that relied exclusively on public health services.

Access to healthcare became more inequitable during the pandemic. Lockdowns, curfews and fear of infection reduced patient visits for routine and chronic health issues. Non-COVID services—such as maternal health, immunizations and treatment for diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS—were disrupted, with serious implications for public health. As the theory suggests, populations already on the margins of healthcare access became even more vulnerable, particularly rural dwellers, the elderly and those with pre-existing conditions. These disruptions have long-term consequences, including increased morbidity from preventable diseases and a backlog in critical treatments.

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The pandemic also exposed the dire conditions under which healthcare workers operated. Doctors, nurses and support staff were at the frontline of the response, often working without adequate protection, support, or hazard pay. Long hours, emotional exhaustion and the trauma of witnessing widespread illness and death took a serious toll on their mental health. Reports of burnout, anxiety, depression and even PTSD among healthcare workers were widespread. Yet institutional responses to their plight were limited and poorly coordinated. In many cases, infected workers lacked access to quality treatment or financial support and some even resorted to industrial actions to demand basic entitlements. Vulnerability Theory underscores how the absence of institutional safeguards for frontline workers diminishes the resilience of the system as a whole.

Further, the pandemic highlighted persistent inequalities in health infrastructure across different regions in Nigeria. Urban centers like Lagos and Abuja, while strained, had relatively better resources to manage COVID-19 cases. In contrast, many rural areas lacked basic facilities such as testing centers, isolation wards and reliable electricity. These disparities reflect structural vulnerability at the geographic and socio-economic levels, leading to stark differences in infection rates, mortality and recovery. Ayeni and Aborisade (2021) observed that these inequities are not incidental but rooted in historical neglect and policy failure.

The response to the pandemic, though marked by efforts such as the establishment of emergency response teams, mobile testing units and public health campaigns, was hampered by governance challenges. Issues of mismanaged funds, lack of transparency in palliative distribution and limited coordination between federal and state health authorities undermined the overall effectiveness of interventions. Vulnerability Theory posits that such institutional dysfunction exacerbates risk exposure by limiting the efficacy of response mechanisms during emergencies.

Despite these challenges, the pandemic also prompted innovations, notably in the use of digital health platforms and telemedicine. These technologies helped sustain some level of healthcare delivery during lockdowns. However, as with online education, access to digital health solutions remained uneven, with rural and low-income populations largely excluded due to poor internet access, low digital literacy and the absence of supportive infrastructure. Consequently, these innovations, while promising, also reflected and reinforced existing inequalities.

Vaccine distribution was another domain where vulnerability was pronounced. Although Nigeria eventually began vaccination campaigns, the rollout was slow and uneven. Logistical issues, vaccine hesitancy and lack of cold chain infrastructure in remote areas hindered progress. Wealthier and urban populations were vaccinated at a much higher rate than their rural and poor counterparts. This inequity not only endangered vulnerable populations but also posed broader public health risks by delaying the achievement of herd immunity. In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed how structural vulnerabilities—ranging from inadequate infrastructure and funding to regional inequality and workforce neglect—undermined the resilience of Nigeria's healthcare system. Through the lens of Vulnerability Theory, these impacts are understood not merely as failures of response but as the predictable outcomes of long-standing institutional and social neglect.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Education

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to Nigeria's education system, revealing and intensifying longstanding vulnerabilities within the sector. Drawing on Vulnerability Theory, which emphasises the structural disadvantages that leave individuals and groups more

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susceptible to harm during crises, this analysis reveals how the pandemic disproportionately affected marginalised students and exposed systemic weaknesses in educational access, delivery and equity. Consistent with the findings of Okagbue *et al.* (2023), Ndejjo *et al.* (2023) and Dessy *et al.* (2021), the impact of the pandemic on education in Nigeria extends beyond temporary school closures to deeper socio-economic and institutional consequences.

One of the most immediate and visible effects of the pandemic was the prolonged closure of schools, colleges and universities. The disruption of the academic calendar brought learning to a standstill for millions of students, especially those in public institutions with limited digital infrastructure. The abrupt shift to remote learning highlighted the entrenched digital divide in Nigeria, where access to internet connectivity, digital devices and reliable electricity remains uneven. Vulnerability Theory explains that such structural disadvantages disproportionately affect students from low-income, rural and underserved communities, leaving them excluded from virtual learning opportunities and compounding existing educational inequities.

The lack of digital literacy and preparedness among teachers further weakened the effectiveness of remote education. Many educators lacked the necessary training, technological tools and institutional support to transition smoothly to online instruction. This situation significantly undermined the quality of education and contributed to learning loss, particularly among younger students and those requiring more personalised instruction. Vulnerable students—those living in poverty, those with disabilities and girls—faced additional barriers to learning. In several communities, economic pressures led to increased dropout rates, child labour and early marriages, especially among girls, reversing progress made in gender equity in education.

Social development and mental health were also adversely affected by school closures. Schools are not only spaces for academic instruction but also for socialisation, emotional support and access to essential services such as school meals and health programs. The absence of these supports during lockdowns contributed to rising cases of emotional distress, anxiety and feelings of isolation among students. According to Vulnerability Theory, the lack of institutional safeguards during the crisis exacerbated these non-academic harms, demonstrating the broader role that education systems play in student well-being.

Higher education institutions were not spared. Universities faced massive disruptions as campus closures forced a hurried shift to online platforms. Many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, lacked the resources to participate meaningfully in online courses. The economic implications of the pandemic also placed a strain on university operations, with reduced revenue from tuition, international student enrolment and campus-based services. As a result, some institutions implemented austerity measures, reducing staff, suspending academic programs, or halting infrastructural projects. Graduating students faced uncertain job markets, with delayed or cancelled recruitment processes, compounding their vulnerability in an already unstable economy.

Importantly, the pandemic's educational fallout is not limited to short-term disruptions. Studies suggest that prolonged learning loss, especially in foundational subjects like literacy and numeracy, may lead to long-term knowledge gaps and declining educational outcomes. The risk of a widening rural-urban educational divide, as well as the possibility of a "lost generation" of students unable to return to school, is consistent with theoretical assertions that crises deepen pre-existing inequalities unless deliberately addressed through systemic intervention.

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Yet, the pandemic also revealed areas for transformation. In response to the crisis, various stakeholders—including governments, NGOs and private sector actors—introduced innovative approaches to sustain learning. The rapid adoption of digital tools, the promotion of radio and television-based learning and the introduction of blended learning models signaled a shift in pedagogical strategies. Vulnerability Theory encourages such institutional adaptability, stressing the importance of resilience-building measures that protect the most at-risk populations in the face of future shocks. In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic served as both a disruptor and a diagnostic tool, exposing the fragility of Nigeria's education system while simultaneously opening a window for reform. The lens of Vulnerability Theory underscores that the educational challenges witnessed during the pandemic were not merely incidental but rooted in structural deficiencies that predated the crisis.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Public Order

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a major disruption to public order in Nigeria, exposing the fragility of governance structures, law enforcement mechanisms and socio-economic systems. Grounded in the framework of Vulnerability Theory, the analysis of this disruption reveals that the pandemic did not merely create new challenges but rather amplified pre-existing structural vulnerabilities that had long been overlooked. The pandemic served as a stress test for Nigeria's capacity to manage collective risk and ensure social stability under pressure and the results highlighted significant deficiencies.

Public order in Nigeria was strained by multiple interconnected factors that emerged as the virus spread and government-imposed restrictions took effect. Economic dislocations caused by lockdowns and movement restrictions resulted in widespread job losses, particularly among the urban poor and those in the informal sector, which constitutes a large portion of Nigeria's workforce. These disruptions contributed directly to civil unrest, including protests, street demonstrations and increased incidences of theft, looting and localised violence. According to Akanmu *et al.* (2021) and further supported by Asangausung *et al.* (2022), the inadequacy and inconsistent distribution of government palliatives exacerbated public frustration, weakening the legitimacy of state responses and increasing citizens' willingness to defy restrictions.

Law enforcement agencies, already operating under capacity constraints, were stretched thin as they sought to enforce lockdowns, curfews and public health mandates. This overextension, coupled with a history of mistrust between police and communities, led to violent clashes and, in some instances, police brutality. The heightened police presence and militarised enforcement, rather than assuring the public, often intensified tensions, creating pockets of resistance and further eroding public trust. Okorie *et al.* (2022) observed that in such contexts, law enforcement became a source of disorder rather than a guarantor of peace, reflecting Vulnerability Theory's emphasis on institutional weaknesses as amplifiers of societal risk.

Furthermore, crime patterns shifted in response to the pandemic. While some street crimes declined due to movement restrictions, other forms of violence surged, including domestic violence, cybercrime and opportunistic crimes linked to economic desperation. These shifts were not random but reflected the adaptive responses of vulnerable populations struggling to survive under rapidly changing conditions. Vulnerability Theory helps explain how structural inequalities, lack of social safety nets and inadequate institutional responses heightened people's exposure to harm while limiting their capacity for resilience.

The deterioration in public order during the pandemic was also political. The #End SARS protests that erupted in October 2020 were not solely reactions to police brutality but were also shaped by accumulated frustration with government failures during the COVID-19 crisis. Shodunke (2022) notes that the protests symbolised a broader reckoning with institutional neglect, unresponsive leadership and socio-economic exclusion. These protests, though not directly caused by the pandemic, were fueled by the socio-political discontent exacerbated by the pandemic environment, aligning with the theory's assertion that vulnerability is both a cause and consequence of poor governance.

Globally, similar patterns emerged, as seen in Latin America, parts of Europe and the United States, where prolonged restrictions, economic hardship and perceived governmental overreach led to waves of civil disobedience and mistrust. However, the Nigerian experience was distinct in its intensity due to the country's weaker public health infrastructure, minimal welfare support and entrenched governance challenges. Unlike more resilient nations that mitigated disorder through strong social safety nets and coordinated public health communication, Nigeria's fragmented and reactive approach revealed the dangers of institutional fragility during times of crisis.

In essence, the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated the complex interrelationship between socio-economic vulnerability, institutional performance and public order. While the virus itself posed a biological threat, the social and political fallout in Nigeria was a product of long-standing systemic weaknesses. Vulnerability Theory offers a fitting lens to interpret these dynamics, emphasising that public disorder in times of crisis is not merely a function of individual defiance or economic downturn, but a reflection of deeper societal inequities and institutional failures. The Nigerian case demonstrates that sustaining public order in emergencies requires more than policing—it demands resilient governance, equitable policy responses and robust social infrastructures that protect the most exposed. The lesson is clear: without addressing underlying vulnerabilities, future crises will continue to produce similar, if not more severe, disruptions to public order.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to present a post-mortem analysis of the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on socio-economic development and public order in Nigeria. The findings revealed that the pandemic exposed and intensified pre-existing structural weaknesses in critical sectors such as health, education, the economy and security. Small businesses collapsed, unemployment surged, public health infrastructure was overwhelmed and educational disruptions widened the urban-rural divide in learning outcomes. Furthermore, the inability of state institutions to adequately mitigate the impact of the crisis contributed to public unrest, heightened crime rates and a decline in trust in government institutions.

These findings have significant implications. First, they demonstrate how vulnerability is not merely a result of individual exposure to risk but is embedded in broader systemic and institutional inequalities. The pandemic disproportionately affected Nigeria's informal sector, low-income earners, women and children—groups that lacked adequate social protection and access to essential services. Second, the fragility of Nigeria's public order under stress highlighted the critical need for resilient governance structures and equitable public policies. The inability to enforce health regulations fairly, combined with inadequate palliatives, contributed to civil unrest, most notably evidenced during the #EndSARS protests.

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The thesis statement that COVID-19 intensified Nigeria's structural vulnerabilities, leading to wide-ranging implications on socioeconomic development and public order due to systemic inequality and institutional incapacity is supported throughout the analysis. By employing Vulnerability Theory, the study advances understanding of how crises impact marginalised populations differently and underscores the necessity of inclusive, pre-emptive policy frameworks. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on the socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic in developing contexts. Unlike generalised global studies, it provides a localised, theory-driven analysis of how a pandemic intersects with systemic fragility in Nigeria. It also bridges empirical findings with theoretical perspectives, offering a robust interpretive framework for understanding the nexus between crisis and inequality.

Future studies should investigate the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on intergenerational poverty and educational attainment in Nigeria, particularly in rural and underprivileged communities. Comparative research across sub-Saharan African countries could provide deeper insights into how differing policy responses influenced outcomes. Moreover, interdisciplinary research combining public health, economics and governance could be undertaken to propose integrated crisis-response frameworks suited to fragile states.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health crisis but also a mirror reflecting the deep-seated inequalities and institutional frailties in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires reimagining governance, investing in resilient infrastructure and embedding social equity in public policy to protect vulnerable populations in the face of future global crises.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following four strong recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Social Protection Systems:** The Nigerian government should prioritise the development of inclusive and responsive social safety nets that protect vulnerable groups such as informal sector workers, women and low-income households during national emergencies. This includes expanding access to unemployment benefits, targeted cash transfers, food support and health insurance, especially in rural and underserved communities.
2. **Invest in Public Health Infrastructure and Emergency Preparedness:** To prevent the collapse of the healthcare system in future health crises, substantial investments must be made in strengthening public health infrastructure, improving disease surveillance, training healthcare personnel and ensuring the availability of critical supplies such as PPE, ventilators and essential drugs. A national pandemic preparedness framework should also be institutionalised.
3. **Bridge the Digital Divide in Education and the Economy:** To reduce the educational and economic inequalities exposed during the pandemic, government and private stakeholders should expand access to digital tools and reliable internet connectivity in rural and low-income areas. This includes subsidising devices for students and supporting teachers with digital literacy training to improve remote learning outcomes and economic participation.
4. **Enhance Institutional Accountability and Crisis Governance:** Effective crisis response requires transparent, efficient and accountable institutions. The Nigerian government should reform its public administration systems to ensure equitable distribution of relief resources, timely implementation of emergency interventions and active engagement with civil society. Strengthening

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public trust through accountability and transparency is essential for maintaining public order during future crises.

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