

COVID-19, Law Enforcement, and Lockdown in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

Law enforcement agencies are always expected to act professionally in performing security duties. The concept of security can include both conventional and human aspects. Human security features prominently in contemporary discussions of international and national security architecture, including pandemic. This study critically examined the responses and activities of Nigerian security agencies, particularly the Nigerian Police and the Nigerian Army, during the COVID-19 lockdown in northern Nigeria. The lockdown and its enforcement by these agencies resulted in human rights violations and other security threats. Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with selected key informants, using a qualitative case study approach. The 15 informants were drawn from various groups, including security personnel, medical doctors, members of affected communities, and government officials. The data were analysed using content analysis. The study found that people in the northern states of Nigeria have grossly violated the lockdown order in search of livelihood due to the enforced, overwhelmingly harsh and severe economy, leading them to use porous routes and sometimes highways to travel between states. This situation resulted in torture, brutality, harassment, and extortion by security agents in the region. The study, therefore, recommends that, in future unforeseen events such as lockdowns, the government should provide for the extremely needy to prevent breaches of law and order, while law enforcement agencies should be guided towards professionalism.

Keywords: COVID-19; human security; law enforcement agency; lockdown; northeast Nigeria



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Introduction

Law enforcement agencies are the guardians of peace in any society and are crucial to maintaining law and order. These agencies are institutions constitutionally established by the state to legalise the exercise of coercion and suppress all forms of illegal insurrection by state and non-state actors (Klantschnig 2009). Globally, there are various forms of law enforcement agencies, including the military, police, customs, immigration, and others, each playing a role in maintaining peace and security. Law enforcement agencies symbolise national sovereignty and integrity, as their ability to effectively control the means of coercion and deter crime determines how strong and reliable a state is. In Nigeria, there are numerous law enforcement agencies, such as the army, police, customs, and immigration, all tasked with maintaining peace and stability in the country (ACCORD 2021). The role of law enforcement agencies in Nigeria is multifaceted and multidimensional. They can act aggressively to deter violence, use intelligence to gather data to prevent unrest, and serve in civilian community activities, including monitoring society during pandemics such as COVID-19 (Omobolanle 2021).

COVID-19 is a global pandemic that has devastated the world in a very short time. The pandemic, which originated in the industrial city of Wuhan, China, in December 2019, spread rapidly across the globe due to increasing global interconnectedness (Hochberg 2020). In less than four months after its initial appearance, it was declared a global pandemic as it quickly spread to Asia, America, Africa, Europe, and all other regions, resulting in millions of cases and, subsequently, hundreds of thousands and later millions of deaths (Rossberg and Robert 2020). Most countries implemented safety measures to contain the spread of the virus. These included partial or complete lockdowns, international travel bans, social distancing, extensive testing, the establishment of isolation centres, and various other measures.

Nigeria recorded its first confirmed case of COVID-19 in March 2020, originating from individuals returning from international travel. Within three months, Abuja and Lagos were severely affected by the pandemic. Due to negligence and delays in announcing a lockdown and interstate travel ban, other states were also impacted (Joseph and Mohammed 2020). In June 2020, the Nigerian government considered it necessary to implement strict measures, including a nationwide lockdown and an interstate travel ban (Sambo and Sule 2021). Law enforcement agencies were tasked with ensuring compliance (Campbell and Jack 2020). However, negligence, bribery, corruption, prevailing attitudes and culture, the severe impact of poverty, and other factors undermined the effectiveness of the lockdown and travel ban, resulting in further spread of the virus throughout the country (Hruby 2020). This paper, therefore, outlines the role of law enforcement agencies during the lockdown and how their ineffectiveness threatened human security by enabling the spread of the pandemic, as people evaded authorities to travel freely and circumvent the lockdown.

Lockdowns, curfews, and travel restrictions were among the unusual public health measures implemented across Nigeria in response to the COVID-19 epidemic in 2020. Although these interventions aimed to stop the spread of the virus, their implementation in northern Nigeria revealed serious issues with human rights, governance, and public confidence in law enforcement. Widespread abuses were reported by the media, civil society, and human rights organisations, including extortion, arbitrary arrests, excessive use of force, and inconsistent enforcement of lockdown regulations. Since law enforcement has traditionally been viewed as coercive rather than service-oriented, these incidents highlighted the fragile relationship between civilians and security authorities in the region. Furthermore, the lockdown measures exacerbated social and economic vulnerabilities by disproportionately affecting rural populations and informal workers who depend on daily income. Although research on COVID-19 and Nigerian governance is expanding, little empirical or theoretical attention has been given to how law enforcement tactics affected public opinion, compliance, and the legitimacy of state power during the northern Nigeria lockdown.

Studies conducted on Nigeria's COVID-19 responses have mainly focused on public health systems, economic effects, and federal-state collaboration; the sociopolitical and law enforcement aspects of pandemic management have received less attention. The relationship between northern Nigeria's public health emergency laws, policing culture, and citizens' rights, a region characterised by complex socioreligious dynamics, poverty, and insecurity, has not received significant critical attention in the literature. This absence hinders a comprehensive understanding of how emergency governance measures function in fragile situations. Therefore, to explain how enforcement tactics affected both adherence to health directives and the state's overall legitimacy during crises, research that integrates public health policy, security studies, and human rights frameworks is required. Closing this conceptual gap can help develop more context-sensitive, rights-based, and humane approaches to law enforcement in the future. This is the major contribution of this study.

Overview of Law Enforcement Agencies in Nigeria

Law enforcement agencies in Nigeria are institutional measures established by the government to demonstrate its legitimacy and to fulfil its primary constitutional functions: protecting the lives and security of citizens and maintaining law and order within Nigerian territory (Klantschnig 2009). In Nigeria, there are many law enforcement agencies with different, coordinated functions, including the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), the Department of State Security Services (DSSS), the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the Nigerian Customs Service (NCS), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS), the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPPTIP), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and

Control (NAFDAC), and the Vehicle Inspection Office (VIO) (WorkforGov 2021). In some cases, a specialised unit is formed from one of these agencies; in other cases, a joint task force is formed between them, or they work side by side, depending on the nature of the task.

Law enforcement agencies in Nigeria are constitutionally assigned different tasks according to their respective roles. For example, the army is specifically responsible for repelling external aggression, defending against external incursions, and restoring order during spontaneous internal situations. The police are closest to society and have the challenging task of preventing and investigating crime, maintaining law and order, and providing related services. Other agencies, such as the Customs and Immigration Service, are responsible for policing the borders and monitoring the entry and exit of people, goods, and services into Nigeria. Some agencies were established for specific purposes, such as the NDLEA, which combats drug trafficking and abuse; NAFDAC, which regulates food quality; and NAPTIP, which detects and prevents human trafficking (Omobolanle 2021).

Law enforcement agencies in Nigeria are perceived as inadequate for the country's population. The Nigerian state has fewer than 400,000 police officers for an estimated population of over 200 million. This contrasts with many other countries. Egypt, for example, with a population of 90 million, has a police force of almost 3 million (Mbanefo 2019). The situation in Nigeria is exacerbated by the diversion of police officers by the ruling class for their own protection, with about one-third serving as private guards for politicians and the elite, to the detriment of ordinary Nigerians. The same applies to the army, customs, immigration, and other agencies (ACCORD 2021). This helps explain why security problems in Nigeria have become insurmountable despite billions of dollars in annual allocations. Customs and immigration authorities cannot adequately control the porous borders, while insufficient army forces have allowed various armed groups in the country to operate with impunity (Mbanefo 2019).

It should also be noted that the responsibility for human security in Nigeria does not rest with law enforcement agencies. Aspects of human security, such as food insecurity, poverty, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, illiteracy, disease, extremism, ethnic and religious clashes, political violence, pandemics, and others, fall under the remit of policymakers and leaders (Campbell 2021). However, this does not mean that law enforcement agencies are not involved or called upon to maintain order when situations spiral out of control due to the negligence of policymakers in addressing human security challenges (Mbanefo 2019). Law enforcement agencies are also negatively affected by poor working conditions. Low pay, lack of motivation, outdated equipment that does not meet modern standards, bribery, and corruption impact them, as do unprofessional and unethical behaviour, all of which affect their performance (Sule et al. 2020; Duerksen 2021). Udeh and Amadi further stated that the weak responses and poor functioning of law enforcement agencies greatly affect public safety regarding the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as inefficiency, aided by corruption, enables

violations of the lockdown and interstate travel bans, allowing people to move freely in defiance of regulations (Udeh and Amadi 2021).

COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

The novel coronavirus, commonly known as COVID-19, began as a mysterious infection in the industrial city of Wuhan, China. The virus presents with respiratory symptoms and infections, and spreads sporadically once contact is made with an infected person (Chen et al. 2020). In some cases, symptoms of COVID-19 infection include high fever, increased body temperature, vomiting, and weakness. The virus spread so rapidly that the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared it a global pandemic in January 2020 (WHO 2020). The disease quickly spread worldwide, affecting almost every continent and country in less than five months after its emergence (Wang et al. 2021). Immediately, countries around the world adopted various measures to counter the spread of the pandemic, including international travel bans, lockdowns, and the introduction of palliative and economic austerity measures to address the severe impact of the virus on the economy and society (He et al. 2020; Rosberg and Knell 2020).

When the coronavirus (COVID-19) first emerged in December 2019, it was clear that the world was facing another global pandemic (Jarus 2021). Between December 2019 and April 2024, there were 704,753,890 cases, 7,010,681 deaths, and 675,619,811 recoveries reported in 231 countries worldwide (Worldometer 2025). The United States, India, France, Germany, Brazil, South Korea, Japan, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Russia are the countries most affected by the pandemic. These 10 countries recorded a total of 418,700,244 cases, accounting for 59.41% of all reported cases. In these 10 countries, 3,757,089 people (53.59 %) died (Worldometer 2025). The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in China and spread around the world (Chen et al. 2020). The virus was first confirmed in Nigeria on 27 February 2020, when an Italian national tested positive in Lagos (Akande-Sholabi and Adebisi 2021). When the Italian national and a Nigerian came into contact in Ewekoro, Ogun State, on 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported. Since these first two cases, the virus has spread rapidly across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. In Nigeria, there have been a total of 259,953 recoveries, 3,155 deaths, and 267,188 infections from 2020–2023 (Worldometer 2025). With the discovery of the Delta variant, which is more harmful than the previous type of the virus, the world has entered the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The most affected states are Lagos, Abuja, Rivers, and Kaduna. It should be noted that although Nigeria is a population giant in Africa, it has a lower incidence of infection than South Africa, Egypt, and other less populous countries (Attah et al. 2021).

Measures and Responses Towards Countering the COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

The government implemented measures for prevention and survival. An interstate travel ban was imposed in June. A lockdown of the cities of Lagos, FCT Abuja, Rivers, Kaduna, and Kano had already been announced in May. As the number of cases increased, the lockdown was extended to the entire country to counteract the spread and serve as a preventive measure. To cushion the impact of poverty, hunger, and suffering resulting from the lockdown and travel ban, which paralysed economic activities and livelihoods, the Nigerian government quickly introduced palliative measures. These included soft loans, the distribution of food and relief items, a moratorium on agricultural and commercial loans with deferred repayment, a reduction in taxes on petty trade, and the distribution of cash (Hruby 2020).

The National Centre for Disease Control (2020) was mobilised for response and prevention. It established special lines for reporting suspected cases. Additionally, random text messages were sent daily to Nigerian mobile phone users, emphasising the need for precautionary measures and available response options. The NCDC set up isolation centres in major cities and immediately began collecting samples and conducting tests. The quarantine policy for domestic and international travellers was reactivated. The government, through the Ministry of Health, allocated billions of naira to the NCDC for the procurement of test kits, isolation beds, equipment for the isolation centres, and drugs for the treatment of infected individuals (National Centre for Disease Control 2020).

Law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, military, and Civil Defence Corps, were engaged in surveillance and enforcement to ensure compliance with the lockdown and travel ban. However, people did not comply as expected, resulting in many travelling and flouting the lockdown without adhering to the COVID-19 protocols of using hand sanitiser, face masks, and maintaining social distancing (Udeh and Amadi 2021). The reasons for this included the government's inability to adequately provide all households with palliatives, insecurity caused by increasing attacks from Boko Haram and bandits during the lockdown, corruption among public officials accused of diverting palliatives for personal gain, and abject poverty that forced many poor people to leave their homes to avoid famine (Kola 2021). The consequences of non-compliance led to a rapid spread of the virus from the urban centres of Lagos, FCT Abuja, Kaduna, Rivers, and Kano to all parts of the country, extending the lockdown into October (Akinwotu and Sanyinnawal 2021).

Impact of COVID-19 on Human Security in Nigeria

The term “human security” has been interpreted in various ways by authorities, organisations, institutions, and researchers. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined human security in its Human Development Report, which began in 1994 under the leadership of Sen and Mahbub Ul Haq. The UNDP (1994)

defined human security as “safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and oppression, and protection from sudden injurious disruptions to daily life.” The UNDP (1994) further emphasised that “the new dimensions of human security include a child who does not die, a disease that does not spread, a job that is not eliminated, an ethnic tension that does not degenerate into violence, a dissident who is not silenced, and universal components that are interdependent, based on preventive rather than reactionary measures, and inherently human-centred.” The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 66/290 states: “Human security is an approach that supports Member States in recognising and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihoods and dignity of their populations (Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development 2020; United Nations 2020). It requires people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented measures that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people.” The widely accepted definitions of human security indicate that the threat of pandemics is a concern from this perspective. COVID-19 is recognised as a threat to human security both globally and in Nigeria. All informants interviewed accepted this without hesitation (Udeh and Amadi 2021).

COVID-19 poses a major challenge to human security in Nigeria. Already, 267,188 infections have been recorded, with more than 259,953 recoveries and 3,155 deaths (NCDC 2020). This constitutes a security threat. Human attitudes in Nigeria have been affected, causing severe psychological trauma (Campbell 2021). The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria caused panic. Many people were so frightened that they developed other psychologically related illnesses, such as anxiety, hypertension, and phobias. Such attitudes led to complications by exacerbating other illnesses. People also behaved in ways that encouraged the spread of the disease itself, such as self-medication and using unproven treatments (Udeh and Amadi 2021).

Another impact of COVID-19 on human security is the security threat itself. Already plagued by internal security threats, the Nigerian state experienced intensified attacks by Boko Haram insurgents in the northeast and by bandits and kidnappers in the northwest, such that from March 2020 to July 2020, several heinous cases were reported in which hundreds of people died, properties were destroyed, livestock disappeared, and people were displaced. From April to June 2020, when the lockdown was officially declared, no fewer than 50 major attacks were recorded in Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, and Kebbi. Some of these attacks claimed almost a 100 lives at a time (Campbell 2021).

The rapid decline in the price of crude oil on the world market also severely affected the Nigerian economy and triggered an economic crisis, representing another aspect of the threat to human security caused by COVID-19. From US\$65 per barrel in the second quarter of 2019, the price of crude oil fell to US\$19 in the first quarter of 2020, the lowest level since the early 2000s. Although the economic impact of COVID-19 affected every country, Nigeria was among the hardest hit. Small businesses collapsed, many private sector workers lost their jobs, and overall economic activity declined

significantly (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2020). Health risks also posed a threat to human security as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Inadequate health facilities, dilapidated infrastructure, insufficient staffing, unprofessional healthcare practices, and other issues—especially the non-payment of allowances to health workers, which led to intermittent strikes during the pandemic, exposed the population to significant health hazards (NCDC 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Securitisation theory is used to explain the phenomenon of human security during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in northern Nigeria and the associated barriers to law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. The theory has its roots in the security debates of authors such as Buzan (1983), Buzan and Hansen (2009) and Buzan and Schouenborg (2018). The Copenhagen School, reinforced by Acharya and Buzan (2019) and his disciples, established a new paradigm that critically sought to move away from traditional strategies of perceiving and analysing security debates at the national and international level. In the interwar and post-war period, most threats to national and global security were perceived as conflicts and military threats. Buzan (1989) had a new thought on the subject. The full inclusion of non-military threats as potential threats with the same ability to threaten national and international security has been academically advanced by Buzan and Hansen (2009) and peers since the 1980s and has gained worldwide acceptance. It is stated that political crises, economic emergencies, social incoherence, pandemics, environmental disasters and other human needs can pose a global security threat (Buzan and Hansen 2009). The Cold War era brought with it new security threats, including nuclear threats, cybercrime and cyber warfare, and socio-economic and political security threats.

In the 21st-century world, most countries are severely affected by poverty, disease, hunger, illiteracy, malnutrition, natural and man-made disasters, food insecurity, the effects of climate change, political violence, conflict and various other related factors that can lead to insecurity, forced migration, displacement, illegal border crossings and crimes that undermine state sovereignty and national security. Although military conventional warfare has diminished, strong economic and military states are vulnerable and face the threat of simple but damaging cyber warfare attacks. Critical national infrastructures and economic investments are being targeted by individuals or adversary states, resulting in damage.

The theory of securitisation explains how the lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic in northern Nigeria was presented as an existential threat, justifying extraordinary measures that paradoxically undermined human security. By framing the pandemic as a crisis requiring urgent action, the authorities shifted public health management to the realm of national security, often at the expense of civil liberties and socio-economic rights. Nigerian authorities portrayed COVID-19 as an unprecedented threat to public health and national stability, as they were the actors responsible for security. This

narrative enabled the imposition of lockdowns, curfews and interstate travel bans without robust parliamentary oversight. For example, the Federal Government invoked the Quarantine Act of 1926, bypassing legislative debates. Military and police forces were involved in enforcing the lockdowns, often using excessive force. Amnesty International (2020) documented cases of beatings, extortion and arbitrary detention, which mainly affected low-income groups who were unable to comply with stay-at-home orders. These actions reflect the “exceptional nature” of the security measures, which overrode normal government mechanisms. The vulnerables found it excessively impossible to stay indoors, decided to come out in search of survival, often clashing with law enforcement agencies who were bribed to overlook the dangers of public appearance, which is believed to have increased the efficacy of the infection of COVID-19.

Method

The study used a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. Data were collected from different informants in a Key Informants Interview (KII) in different geopolitical zones in northern Nigeria. Data collection took place in three states in the North. In the northeast, Gombe State was selected because it plays a central role in connecting all the northeastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Taraba and Yobe. In the north-central, Plateau State was selected because it is in the centre of the zone and connects Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Niger and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Kano State was selected in the northwest, linking all the northwestern states of Jigawa, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. The reason for selecting centres in each of the three geopolitical zones of the North is to ensure accurate monitoring of movements and activities during the COVID-19 lockdown for an effective account of the events of the collapse of order and the brutality of the law enforcement agencies. The travellers from each of the three selected states went through all the states in these zones.

A total of 15 informants were selected and interviewed in the three selected states. These informants were selected from four categories. In category A (security agencies), four security officers were selected: one from the Nigerian Army, one from the Nigerian Police Force (NPF), one from the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and one from the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC). In the second category (academics), three persons were selected, each from a university in the selected state. In the northeast, a Professor from the Department of Political Science at the University of Maiduguri was interviewed. In the northeast, a Professor of Public Administration at the University of Jos was interviewed, and in the northwest, a Professor in the Department of Sociology was interviewed. In the third category (government agencies), four senior officials of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), who were stationed in the respective selected study centres, were interviewed along with other healthcare professionals, including physicians working to combat COVID-19. In the

fourth category, four members of the host communities in the sampled states were interviewed, two from Kano and one each from Gombe and Plateau.

The informants were selected based on three main criteria. One of these is accessibility. Those informants from all categories who are known to the authors or with whom they are in contact were contacted and interviewed. The second criterion is the relevance and quality of the data that the selected informants have on the topic. The third criterion is the requirement for an interview in a qualitative study. Sharan (2009) suggests a minimum of four and a maximum of 30. Creswell (2014) suggests a minimum of three and a maximum of 24, with an average of 15, depending on the availability of literature and the need for information on the subject matter. Yin (2018), on the other hand, is of the opinion that there is no minimum or maximum number, but that the necessity of the topic under investigation is decisive. In this study, 15 people are considered appropriate if the selected informants provide information up to the saturation point, which was the case.

Participant observation was carried out by the researchers at three large sites. In the Gombe zone, one of the authors used the main arterial road. A road that connects all the northeastern states to observe the movements and violations, and the corresponding actions of the security personnel. The same was applied in the northwest, where the other author used the main arterial road for the assignment, and in Plateau, a research assistant was engaged for the same observation. The observation was conducted from May 2020 to July 2020 during the lockdown policy.

The data collection instrument for the KII was unstructured questionnaires with interview guidelines designed for each of the four categories. The data collection took place between 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 heat period. All informants were surveyed and interviewed in their respective areas. The questionnaires were validated by some experts from the Department of Political Science, Gombe State University and the Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State.

The data obtained were transcribed, and some themes were extracted. The views of the informants were cited where they were particularly relevant in comparison with the existing literature and the application of the theoretical framework used in this paper.

Discussions

In this section, the results and discussion of the findings are presented under two main themes: i. Factors that led to deviation from compliance with the lockdown and travel ban in northern Nigeria, and ii. The consequences of weak law enforcement oversight on human security during the COVID-19 lockdown and travel ban in northern Nigeria.

Factors that Led to the Deviance of Observing Lockdown and Travel Ban in Northern Nigeria

One of the factors identified in this study, based on field findings, that led to the deviation from or violation of interstate travel bans and lockdown laws is bribery and corruption among law enforcement agencies. Most interviewees, including security agents themselves, admitted that they were bribed to permit the free movement of people and goods between states, and that lawbreakers paid bribes during the total lockdown to move about cities and towns as if no such law existed. For example, some informants reported that many checkpoints were established, while existing ones were kept on alert to monitor all state borders. Once apprehended, travellers paid between N100 and N500 per person to avoid punishment, torture, or harassment by law enforcement agencies. In other cases, drivers had to pay between N500 and N1000 at each checkpoint, in addition to the travellers, to secure passage. According to one informant, security personnel turned the lockdown and travel ban during COVID-19 in Nigeria into a source of income and an opportunity to torture vulnerable Nigerians. This was how travellers from Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, Kano and other parts of the North reached Lagos and vice versa. Other informants reported that goods transported by heavy trucks were intercepted by law enforcement officers, who collected up to N5,000 from them to allow illegal passage. This occurred despite the announcement that only essential goods would be permitted to pass without sanctions. Corruption is therefore the primary reason why the lockdown has been fundamentally disregarded, leading to an increased spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

A remarkable case is reported by an informant from the affected communities. He stated,

My father was ill and the doctor at the Federal Teaching Hospital Gombe recommended a CT scan. Unfortunately, there was not a single functional machine for this type of examination in the state. We had two options: to go to Kano or Plateau. We chose Plateau because it was closer. On the way from Gombe to Plateau, we were stopped by security forces. Although we presented the doctor's written recommendation, they insisted that we either pay to continue our journey or return with the patient. In the end, we gave them N5000 after they repeatedly claimed we had violated the lockdown policy. (KII with a Category D informant, member of the affected communities, conducted in May 2021).

Another divergent view is presented by a Category A informant (security personnel). The informant recounts,

We were forced to take bribes from the public we were supposed to protect for their health. They will never understand all the explanations and sometimes use a hidden way to pass. When we insisted that they must return, they offered us money and sometimes we were willing to do so, not for the money but for the persuasion and convincing excuses (KII with a Category A informant, member of the security personnel, conducted in January 2021).

This is supported by Campbell and McCaslin (2020) and Hruby (2020). In this case, law enforcement agencies neglected their duties out of compassion and allowed people and goods to be transported in violation of the lockdown and travel ban.

An example of how the sluggish Nigerian economy escalated violations of COVID-19 protocols and lockdowns was described in an interview by a tomato farmer in one of the states. He said:

On the eve of the COVID-19 pandemic, I planted tomatoes, peppers and other vegetables. When I was about to harvest my produce, the lockdown was imposed. If I had not taken my vegetables away to sell them, I would have lost all my agricultural capital and would not have had a cent to my name. I had to bribe the security personnel to allow me to pass and sell my produce (KII with a Category D informant, member of the affected communities, conducted in July 2020).

A Category B informant (academic) confirms the reason for this offence and complains that

policy inconsistencies were the main cause of the offence. For example, after the lockdown was imposed, the government should have compensated vulnerable people and those who own perishable goods and weak businesses for their losses to avoid violating the order, which in turn led to bribery of law enforcement agencies and brutality by security agencies, as witnessed everywhere (KII with a Category B informant, academic, conducted in March 2021).

In addition, Nigerian culture and attitudes affected the effectiveness of the lockdown and the interstate travel ban. Some high-profile individuals considered themselves too important to obey the law and therefore travelled from one major city to another, in some cases with the full support and protection of law enforcement agencies that accompanied them. For example, an informant in this study reported that a senior Nigerian politician, accompanied by security personnel, unknowingly and negligently travelled from Abuja to Kano with a person infected with COVID-19. Instead of isolating and quarantining himself as a precaution, he continued to interact with many people, so that by the time the disease was discovered, many had already been infected.

In this context, securitisation theory is directly applicable. Pandemics are considered non-traditional security threats with far-reaching consequences, such as breaches of lockdown through illegal movements, bribery of corrupt security personnel to gain passage, and the brutality of security personnel, which is another form of human rights violation and security threat.

Consequences of Weak Surveillance of Law Enforcement Agencies on Human Security During the COVID-19 Lockdown and Travel Ban in Northern Nigeria

The failure of law enforcement agencies to effectively and efficiently enforce the lockdown and travel ban led to a human security crisis in Nigeria during the COVID-

19 lockdown and travel ban. The virus gained ground and spread rapidly, reaching all areas of the country within three months. Furthermore, informants' reports indicate that by the end of August, no state had been spared from COVID-19 infection, even though the governors of Kogi and Cross River states denied it (Akinwotu and Sanyinnawal 2021). This is due to the failure of law enforcement agencies to fulfil their responsibilities of monitoring movement across state borders and maintaining the lockdown. Human lives have been at high risk of COVID-19 infection, but the actions of security agencies in Nigeria have exposed people to even greater dangers (Hamrouni 2021).

An informant from the NCDC/medical and health practitioner category reported that

the lockdown was ineffective, as people went about their daily business as if the situation were normal. This was facilitated by the bribery of security personnel and the precarious economic situation, which forced some families to move around to make a living (KII with a Category C informant, NCDC/medical and health personnel, conducted in October 2020).

Another opinion: "The uncontrolled movement of people violating the lockdown was unfortunate. Several intercepted individuals were diagnosed with the virus while travelling between states" (KII with a Category C informant, NCDC/medical and health workers, conducted in July 2020). A Category B informant, Academic, echoed this view, stating that

unchecked freedom of movement, ineffective security monitoring, a culture of distrust in government and its policies, failure to activate a mechanism to provide palliatives, and other issues have led to violations that have allowed the virus to spread rapidly in Nigeria" (KII with a Category B informant, Academic, conducted in May 2021).

Another consequence of weak enforcement by law enforcement agencies in Nigeria is the escalating crisis of insurgency and banditry. According to reports from informants, people, including criminals, pay between N500 and N1000 to move freely during the lockdown and travel ban. This has enabled insurgents in the north east and bandits in the north west to transport their weapons easily, which has been linked to the increase in attacks. Akinwotu and Sanyinnawal (2021) report that from April to July 2020, over 30,000 refugees crossed the Nigerian border into the Republic of Niger, most of them women and children. The refugees reported horrific experiences of human suffering at the hands of the bandits and during their journey to safety. Rape of women, including minors, killings, the burning of huts and houses in villages, sporadic shootings after midnight, the destruction of farms and livestock, kidnappings, and the wilful destruction of wealth and property were all reported by the refugees (Hamrouni 2021). Despite the closure of international borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNHCR ensured that refugees were allowed to enter the territory of the Republic of Niger. The refugees were brought to safety and provided with water, food, shelter, access to medical care, and other basic needs. A similar situation is reported by Campbell and McCaslin (2020)

from the north east, where Boko Haram took advantage of the lockdown and travel ban to commit further heinous crimes.

In this context, a Category A informant, security personnel, reported that

the lack of cooperation from the population and the restriction of their freedom of movement led insurgents, bandits, and other criminals to disguise themselves as innocent travellers, transport weapons under valid pretexts, and intensify their attacks during the lockdown to seize food, medicines, and other palliatives offered to the population (KII with a Category A informant, security personnel, conducted in September 2020).

However, another informant disagreed with this view and blamed the security personnel for the increased insecurity. He stated:

Without the active cooperation of the security personnel, who were supposed to block all movements except legitimate ones, insecurity would not have escalated as it did during the lockdown. Insurgents, bandits, and other criminals offered bribes to pass with concealed weapons and moved unhindered to target locations to carry out their crimes (KII with a Category D informant, members of the affected communities, conducted in May 2021).

Corruption was further glorified and entrenched during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Nigerian security agencies, previously expected to fight corruption, maintain law and order, and provide peace and security, have become a citadel of monumental corruption. They have seized the opportunity to enrich themselves. There is concern that, in the event of a future lockdown and travel ban, as the Delta variant is currently spreading rapidly in the country, the security agencies will revert to these harmful practices. However, some informants lamented that they cannot blame the law enforcement agencies entirely, as they are not adequately remunerated by policymakers. They suffer from poor salaries, withheld allowances, and other entitlements. They receive little or no attention when injured. All this serves as a reminder of the situation they face. Corruption in all its forms hinders good governance and prudent economic management, which is the root cause of poverty, unemployment, and hunger among many Nigerians.

The theory of securitisation thus asserts that non-military threats, as identified by Buzan (1989), Buzan and Hansen (2009), Buzan and Schouenborg (2018), and Acharya and Buzan (2019), can be as serious as traditional security threats if not adequately addressed and countered. The outbreak of COVID-19 and its emergence and spread in Nigeria led to several other security threats, including economic collapse, bribery and corruption, further spread of the pandemic, and the breakdown of socio-economic and cultural systems. This was the main reason for the rapid spread of the virus in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The study established a link between law enforcement agencies and human security in Nigeria during the COVID-19 lockdown and travel ban. The devastating impact of COVID-19 forced the Nigerian state to adopt measures already implemented by other severely affected countries. To contain the spread and combat the epidemic, the government introduced several measures, including testing, quarantine, isolation, and ultimately lockdowns and travel bans. To ensure effective compliance, the country's law enforcement agencies—particularly the Nigerian Police, the Army, the NSCDC, Customs, and Immigration—were heavily involved in maintaining law and order. However, several factors, such as corruption, poverty, attitudes, and related issues, led law enforcement agencies to break the law in exchange for bribes from those violating the travel ban and lockdown. This situation had a significant impact on public safety, resulting in the rapid spread of the virus, increased riots and banditry, and other health risks. The chapter concludes that law enforcement agencies are responsible for the threat posed by COVID-19 and the human security of Nigerians because they have been penalised by the government and are not adequately provided for. Their low pay and lack of motivation due to delayed payment of allowances and inadequate provision of modern firearms have led to their deviant attitude.

The chapter, therefore, suggests that the situation must not be allowed to continue, as there is a risk of another imminent lockdown and travel ban due to the Delta variant, which is spreading rapidly in the country at the time of this study. The government needs to investigate previous events and retrace its steps to avoid jeopardising public safety. A study of this nature is necessary so that policymakers can scrutinise the causes, manifestations, and policy implications. One recommendation of this study is that the government should review the overall state of law enforcement services to better equip them for future tasks. In addition, law enforcement agencies require modern firearms to address all illegal armed groups. Extensive public education through the media is necessary to inform people about the health hazards and threats to human security that they have caused by violating the lockdown and travel ban. All offenders caught during future lockdowns, regardless of status, must face the full force of the law. The government should also improve the provision of palliatives to reach more people in need and encourage them to remain at home and comply with the law when a lockdown is imposed.

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