



The Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic and Off-Cycle Elections in Nigeria: The October 10, 2020 Governorship Election In Ondo State

Okoye Gabriel N. (Ph.D)

**Department of Political Science
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria**

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of COVID-19 disease in the year 2019 in China was a worrisome disturbance to the Electoral process in the world and Nigeria in particular due to the health challenges of the people. The disease is a new pathogen that is highly contagious, that can spread quickly and must be considered capable of causing enormous health, economic and societal impacts in any country. The world Health Organization (WHO) declared this disease pandemic outbreak in the year 2020, which has claimed many lives in the world. Nigeria recorded its COVID-19 index case in February 27, 2020, when Italian citizen tested positive to the virus in Lagos. This difficult time was when the Governorship Election in Ondo State was billed to be conducted, so the Election Management Body (EMB) in synergy with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and Presidential Task Force (PTF) developed a policy framework (COVID-19 Pandemic Protocols) as a general protective measures to protect election officials, voters and stakeholders in the electoral process from the dangers of the disease. The policy framework ensures that the sanitizers and hand thermometers were deployed to check the temperature of voters in the polling units. It was equally mandatory to use face masks for all electoral officials and voters in the polling units, also it was mandatory for social and physical distancing in all electoral activities. This policy framework was used in Edo Governorship Election, so it was carried forward to Ondo State Governorship Election which was free, fair and credible. The incumbent Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of All Progressives Congress (APC) scored 292,830 votes to defeat Eytayo Jegede, candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who came second with 195,791 votes, while Agboola Ajayi of Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) had 69,217 votes. The Covid-19 Pandemic gripped the whole world with shock, thereby overwhelming the health and Electoral System of States.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, off-cycle Governorship Elections, World Health Organization (WHO), Ondo State, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic occurred first in the Chinese City of Wuhan with uncertain origin which took the world by storm, ravaging Europe and tormenting America and desperately burrowing into Africa and other regions of the world. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which the World Health Organization (WHO) called pandemic in the year 2020, has squarely put into context, the notion of our common humanity contained in the vision of building a community of shared future for all mankind. As this disease keeps spreading across the World, many have fallen victim of the dreaded virus, while governments over the world are making efforts, to contain the spread by producing

vaccine to stop the pandemic. In Nigeria, schools were closed and many states shut down markets and public offices.

The COVID-19 Pandemic is a new pathogen that is highly contagious, can spread quickly and must be considered capable of causing enormous health, economic and societal impacts in any setting. The individuals at highest risk for severe disease and death include people aged over 60 years and those with underlying conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory disease and cancer (Onunaiju, 2020:12). The infectious disease according to the World Health Organization (WHO), causes respiratory illness (like the flu) with symptoms such as cough, fever, and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing. The virus is spread primarily through contact with an infected person when they cough or sneeze. It also spreads when a person touches a surface or objects that has the virus on it, and then touches their eyes, nose, or mouth. Nigeria recorded its first case of COVID-19 Pandemic death in February 27, 2020 by an Italian citizen in Lagos.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has globally propelled unexpected social, economic and political developments that presently frightens the public, embarrassed the World powers, put the credibility and decency of nations under serious scrutiny; brought about threat to, and loss of lives across the world. And forced nations irrespective of colour, nationality, sex, believe or creed to scamper for solution. In Nigeria, the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 and the secretary to the Government of the Federation, Boss Mustapha (2021:27) warned that the country crossed 2,000 fatalities on March 12, 2021 and that we have 2,013 recorded deaths. He said that Nigerian authorities have tested and authorized the use of the Astrazeneca Vaccine in Nigeria because it was safe and efficacious and even with the vaccine, people should continue to make use of non-pharmaceutical interventions.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in synergy with the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 Pandemic and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) introduced public policy of non-pharmaceutical interventions as a measure to follow during the conduct of Governorship election in Ondo State as was applicable to Edo Election. The general protective measures used during the October 10, 2020 election were:

- (i) The infrared thermometers was supplied to check temperature at the Local Government Areas (LGAs), Registration Area Centres (RACs), Collation Centres and Polling Units (PUs).
- (ii) The wearing of face mask was mandatory for all involved in the election process and it was strictly enforced at all election locations. However, some voters and stakeholders were asked to lower their face mask for identification when necessary.
- (iii) The rules of physical distancing was enforced in all election activities, including stakeholder engagements, training, queuing at polling units, among others.
- (iv) The Alcohol-based hand sanitizers was used for the election officials at the polling units.
- (v) Methylated spirit and cotton wool was used for the disinfection of the Smart Card Readers (SCRs) after the finger print of each voter was read.
- (vi) Voting started 8.30am and stopped at 2.30pm. There were two queues-One inside and one outside the polling area. However, by 2.30pm, the outer queue closed, but any voter on the outer queue at 2.30pm were allowed to vote.
- (vii) The commission (INEC) worked with the PTF and health authorities to have in place a system of voluntary COVID-19 testing for all election officials before and after deploying for elections. Any voter showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as high temperature, coughing, sneezing, among others were asked to leave the queue or voting area to be attended to by designated health officials (INEC Manual, 2020).

The of-cycle governorship in election in Ondo State was conducted on October 10, 2020 by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) amidst the devastating health challenges of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria. The All Progressives Congress (APC) flag bearer, the incumbent governor, Oluwarotimi Akeredolu garnered 292,830 votes to defeat Eyitayo Jegede (SAN), candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), who came second with 195,791 votes. Agboola Ajayi, who had an endless political brawl with Akeredolu and finally ended up in the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) came a distance third with 69,217 votes.

It was evident that the contest was a straight battle between the APC's standard bearer in the election, who is also the incumbent, Akeredolu, and candidate of opposition PDP, Prof. Eytayo Jegede (SAN). It was actually contest between State governors on both political divide, because while those elected on the platform of APC turned the knowledge of their mistakes in Edo State into secret of success, their counterpart from PDP left their heads in the moon in anticipation of who takes the lions share of the credit, when victory is won. And while the PDP governors, majority of whom are outsiders in southwest politics dreamed of conquest, they carried on with the distant swagger that there was nothing to lose. But for those in APC, they felt the heat and pulled resources and ideas and strategies to retain their hold on the sunshine state. Based on that scenario, Governors Mai Mala Buni (Yobe), Babajide Sanwo-Olu (Lagos), Adegboyega Oyetola (Osun), Senator Atiku Bagudu (Kebbi), Dr. Abdullahi Umar Ganduje (Kano), Prince Dapo Abiodun (Ogun), AbdulRazag Abdullahi (Kwara) and Yaya Bello (Kogi) put their differences and even the presidency behind them and worked for APC's redemption (Sobechi; 2020:23).

Announcing the results at the State Headquarters of INEC in Akure, the Chief Returning Officer who was also the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Prof. Olayinka (2020:13) said Akeredolu polled the highest number of lawful votes in the election. He said that Akeredolu had fulfilled all constitutional provisions regarding the election, thus was returned elected. Akeredolu had won in 15 out of the 18 Local Governments Areas in the State, defeating his deputy, Ajayi, and Former Commissioner for Justice, Eytayo Jegede who won in three (3) Local Government Areas. Moreover, Ajayi who came as a distant third did not win any of the 18 Local Government Areas of the state. The election was free, fair and credible.

The Governor of Ondo State Rotimi Akeredolu and his deputy was sworn in, on February 24, 2021 for second term. The Governor Akeredolu (2021:14) in his swearing speech promised effective project implementation, assuring that there will be no abandoned project in any district under his administration. He urged the people to support his administration to serve them better and leave a lasting legacy. President Buhari (2020:13) congratulated Governor Akeredolu on his re-election and urged him to be humble and magnanimous in victory, and serve the people of Ondo State even better than how he did in his first term. He appreciated the electorate in Ondo for comporting themselves decently and in Order, and for exhibiting conduct that indicates that the country is making progress in its electoral behaviour. The president also gave Kudos to the INEC for organizing a credible, free and fair election, and to security agencies which ensured that orderliness was enthroned and maintained.

There were pockets of violence in the build upto the election in Akure, the Ondo State Capital as political thugs engaged in a bloody clash which left three persons with serious gunshot injuries. Dayo (2020:9) stated that the bloody clash was coming barely five days to the governorship election in the state. He said that the soldiers, mobile detectives and other security operatives were deployed to the troubled scene to restore peace. Some people were also injured as thugs sympathetic to the two major political parties – the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) engaged in a bloody clash at Ijomu/Oba-Nla junctions in Akure metropolis. In the light of the above, the Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar (2020:9) cautioned the candidates of the APC, PDP and ZLP, Rotimi Akeredolu, Eytayo Jegede and Agboola Ajayi respectively to Shun violence during the Governorship Election in the state. He gave the warning during a peace pact signed by the three major parties and their candidates, which was organized by the National Peace Committee (NPC).

Ondo State was created on February 3, 1976 from the former western region and it originally included the Present Ekiti State which was split off in 1996. Ondo State was created by the General Murtala Ramat Mohammed Military Administration. Akure is the State Capital and the ethnic composition of Ondo state is largely from the Yoruba subgroups of the Akoko, Akure, Ikale, Ilaje, Ondo and Owo.

Theoretical Perspective of the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic in the Off-Cycle Elections in Nigeria

Coronaviruses are enveloped non-segmented positive sense RNA viruses belonging to the family coronaviridae and the order Nidovirales and broadly distributed in humans and other mammals. In December 2019, a series of pneumonia cases of unknown cause emerged in Wuhan, Hubei, China, with clinical presentations greatly resembling viral pneumonia. Deep sequencing analysis from lower

respiratory tract samples indicated a novel coronavirus, which was named 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Following the Pneumonia cases of unknown cause reported in Wuhan and considering the shared history of exposure to Huanan Seafood Market across the patients, an epidemiological alert was released by the local health authority on December 31, 2019, and the market was shut down on January 1, 2020 (Huang, 2020: 1-2). With the advent of the COVID-19 Pandemic that is ravaging and changing the entire world system, the World socio-political system are threatened. When coronavirus is claiming human lives from every county around the world, claiming millions of people. A time when mankind are deprived of essentials of life. A time when insecurity has threatened and over stretched the resolve of security agencies across the world.

The year 2020 has been a very precarious, apprehensive and uncertain for people across the globe. The COVID-19 Pandemic caused overwhelming pains and disruption for many, and has made people begin to review their own mortality and assess the safety of their loved ones. Yet, the alarming wave of deaths from COVID-19 continues to sweep across societies and countries like hurricane. It is indeed disheartening that the wave of COVID-19 Pandemic seems to be on increase in recent times. No doubt, the world has a handful of great challenges towards health issues. Though, COVID-19 is yet another sobering reminder that in the age of globalization, the future of countries are closely linked and building a community with a shared future for mankind is the right way to go.

As the COVID-19 Pandemic gripped the whole World with a shock, thereby overwhelming the health and political system of Nigeria. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in synergy with the Presidential Task Force (PTF) on COVID-19 Pandemic and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) initiated new ways of living and doing things called COVID-19 protocols or the public policy of the country. Therefore, policy is viewed as designating behaviour of some actor or set of actors, such as an official or government agency, or legislator, in area of activity such as public enterprise or poverty reduction. Put differently, public policy also may be seen as whatever a government chooses to do or not to do. But such definition may be sufficient for ordinary discourse, but definitely inadequate for a systematic analysis of public policy, hence a more precise definition is needed to structure our thinking and to facilitate effective communication with one another. Policy is a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or a matter of concern (Anderson, 1997).

Public policy means the actual resource allocation presented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public problems and challenges requiring government action for their solution. That is, it should mean hard patterns of resource allocation presented by projects and programmes designed to respond to perceived public demands (Anyebe, 2018:8-17). The theoretical framework for this research work will be the commission's measures (public policy) used in the conduct of governorship election in Ondo State in the midst of COVID-19 Pandemic. The measures or public policy used were as follows:

- (i) Wearing of face mask at polling units and all election locations was mandatory.
- (ii) Voting starts by 8.30am and stops at 2.30pm, however all the voters already on the queue to vote would be allowed to vote until the last voter cast his/her vote.
- (iii) Infrared thermometer were used to check temperature. Any voter showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as high temperature, coughing, sneezing among others will leave the queue or voting area to be attended by designated health officials.
- (iv) The cell phones or any other device that can take pictures were not allowed in the voting cubicles.
- (v) Methylated spirit and cotton wool were provided for the disinfection of the Smart card readers (SCRs) after the finger prints of each voter was read. An election official may ask to clean your fingers with an antiseptic before your finger print was read with the Smart Card Reader.
- (vi) Physical distancing of two (2) meters (6 feet) must be maintained on the queues and all around the polling unit (INEC Manual, 2020).

In the light of the above, the INEC measures for election or public policy (COVID-19 Protocols) stated above will be the theoretical framework for this work. The major challenge facing Nigeria on the COVID-19 Pandemic or the public policy is that the citizens don't believe or trust the government even

when they are telling the truth or planning something beneficial to the citizens. Going through the numerous comments of people on social media, one would discover that many don't even believe the existence of the virus in Nigeria not to talk about seeing the need for a vaccine. With numerous conspiracy theories and opinions about the vaccine flying around, one can easily spot the tough task ahead to convince people to take the vaccine. If our government were believable it would not have been seen as a tough task.

In the midst of COVID-19 Pandemic, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) conducted the governorship election on October 10, 2020. The election was a serious contest between the three major political parties in the state, the All Progressives Congress (APC), the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP). The candidate of All Progressives Congress (APC) Oluwarotimi Akeredolu polled 292, 830 votes to defeat the PDP candidate Eyitayo Jegede who scored 195,791 votes while ZLP candidate, Agboola Ajayi polled 69,217 votes to come third.

(a) The All Progressive Congress (APC) Ruling Party Perspective/Interests: The incumbent Governor Rotimi Akeredolu survived traps and political land mines, as he was suspended by the national leadership of the APC, but got reprieved when he was given a clean bill of health by the Mai Mai Buni-led National Working Committee. The opposition elements within the APC had been buoyed by the suspension of Akeredolu to heighten their onslaught, especially within the Unity Forum led by Former Deputy Governor Ali Olanusi. It was also reported that the embattled deputy governor, Ajayi, found solace in the alleged suspension to lubricate his ambition to supplant Akeredolu. The once vociferous and dreaded Unit Forum rallied round Akeredolu a few days after the primary, following an unusual diplomatic shuttle by the governor.

Akeredolu even enlisted the support of APC national leader, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu to rein all supposedly aggrieved party leaders to back Akeredolu ahead of the election. Chieftains, including Olusola Oke (SAN), Ambassador Sola Iji, Ife Oyedele and others, took the Aketi battle as their personal project and rid the south of Anti-Akeredolu remnants. Another fearful scenario Akeredolu survived was his ill-health in 2019 when he was away for almost three months. His return to base after about three weeks of rest in Abuja, rather than easing tension, exasperated it as the state was sharply divided into the Aketi/Ajayi Camps. The fear of Ajayi, touted as a grassroots politicians dumping the APC was most palpable. But, it finally happened after denials, when the then deputy governor dumped Akeredolu and APC for the PDP, though the deputy governor (Ajayi) lost the governorship primary to Jegede of PDP (Oladesu, 2021:14).

However, two things forced APC governors to reduce emphasis on 2023 calculations and rather focus on the battle for the governorship elections in Ondo State. One was the fear of the huge setback and monumental shame the party would suffer from two straight gubernatorial losses despite being in control at the federal level with the power of incumbency. There was also the unspoken claim that the Ondo governorship, like its Edo State counterpart, was an indirect referendum on the five years of the APC administration. Apart from the fact that President Muhamadu Buhari claims responsibility for the party's loss of Edo, the governors, who knew the implications of the declining fortune of the party on their political futures, decided to take their destiny in their hands. Winning back Ondo State therefore would not only restore APC's bragging rights, but also ensure that the South west remains its bastion of support. The APC governorship campaign council, disclosed that coming barely three weeks after the Edo State Governorship, Akeredolu's victory defines the party's (APC) ideological preference for physical infrastructure to stomach infrastructure of the opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) (Sobechi, 2020:23).

The decision of the Former Deputy Governor Ajayi to align with the former governor, Olusegun Mmiko-led Zenith Labour Party (ZLP), opened a fresh chapter of tension and apprehensions Ajayi's touted force in the Southern Senatorial district had remained untainted even as Mimiko's legendary political maneuverings were frightening. If the Northern senatorial district was taken for granted as Aketi's enclave, not only did Akeredolu win the entire Southern district initially given to Ajayi. The governor defeated his erstwhile deputy in his local government, Ese-Odo, where Niger-Delta activist and

businessman, Chief Bibopre Ajube, coordinated activities and held sway for Akeredolu alongside other APC leaders.

(b) The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) Perspective/Interests: On 22nd July 2020, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) held its governorship primary, decided by two thousand, one hundred and eleven (2111) delegates, the fate of eight (8) governorship aspirants, as non-party delegates were barred from the venue of the election. The primary election took place at the International Culture and Event Centre, the Dome, in Akure, Ondo State. Meanwhile, at a meeting held in Abuja with the National Chairman of the Party, Prince Uche Secondus, the eight (8) aspirants signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to support any candidate that emerges at the primary election. This was sequel to the failed efforts by the National Working Committee (NWC) to ensure the emergence of a consensus candidate among the eight aspirants (Dayo, 2020: 9).

Moreover, about eight hundred (800) policemen were deployed to monitor the PDP governorship primary election in the State. Other security operatives present at the venue of the election were personnel of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) and the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC). The chairman of the Ondo PDP Governorship Primary Election was Governor of Enugu State, Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, other committee members include Governor Ahmed Fintiri of Adamawa State, among others. In the primary election, Ajayi scored 657 votes, while Jegede Eytayo (SAN) polled 888 votes to emerge as the PDP flagbearer of the party. However, Jegede dedicated his victory to PDP members and other co-contestants and urged them to ensure they work together for the victory of the party.

In his acceptance speech after the Party Primary, Jegede (2020:36) said, “I served notice on the APC that for them the end has come and solemnly assured you all that, with your collaboration and the special grace of God we shall record overwhelming victory in the governorship election coming up in October, and there will be accelerated and social –economic upliftment throughout the state, without exception. We are all winners in Ondo state and I, dedicate this victory to people of Ondo and to my co-aspirants who have shown sportsmanship. I will be drawing from the support of my brothers (that is, co-contestants) in the task of liberating Ondo State from the shackles of the suffocating government of the Akeredolu-led APC government in Ondo State. We must ensure that we come together as one family, and harmonies ideas, resources and come together in love, to rescue Ondo State from its hiatus. My fellow contestants must be part of it all party faithful must take ownership of this project regardless of the result”.

National Chairman of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Uche Secondus (2020:9) urged the electorate in Ondo State to vote out the governorship candidate of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC), Rotimi Akeredolu, because the party (APC) has failed Nigerians woefully at all levels. While blaming the APC and its supporters for the recurring violence in the State, he appealed to the people of Ondo State to protect their votes and resist any attempt by the ruling party to rig the governorship election results. He urged the electorate to come out en mass to vote for the PDP and defeat the APC governorship candidate, Governor Rotimi Akeredolu. He said that Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security agencies should be allowed to do their duties professionally without interference on the conduct of the governorship election in Ondo State.

The south-west zone of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was expected to play a major role in the election of Jegede as the governorship candidate of the party like his counterpart in APC that united with the governors in the Zone to work for Akeredolu’s victory. The bone of contention was that, Governor Seyi Makinde of Oyo State, who by virtue of his standing as the only PDP governor in the south-west zone, could not agree with the former governor of Ekiti State, Ayo Fayose on how to propel the zone to prominence. The misunderstanding between Makinde and Fayose played out during debates and discussions over the rationale of gifting the then incumbent Ondo State Deputy-Governor, Agboola Ajayi with the party’s ticket after he crossed over from APC. It was gathered that while the major argument of Fayose and other PDP stakeholders revolved on zoning arrangement in the state and funding capabilities, Makinde and some others insisted on a level playing field for the aspirants to slug it out in the party’s governorship straw poll. It is yet to be seen from the hindsight whether PDP was headed for defeat after

Ajayi failed to get its ticket and veered off to Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) or by allowing the petty disagreements between its prominent stakeholders in the south west zone to rob it of cohesion.

The greatest lose in the Ondo governorship election was the immediate past governor, Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, who rejected alliance with the main Opposition Party (PDP) in the state. However, shortly after the last minute effort to patch up a political understanding between Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) hit the rocks, some PDP leaders recalled how vaulting ambition to be his own man led Mimiko out of the party shortly after the 2016 election. Moreover, talks aimed at forging an alliance weeks to the October 10, 2020 gubernatorial poll brought Mimiko close to his former PDP colleagues, as they weighed the strengths and weaknesses of the gladiators. During the talks, which many saw as a window of opportunity for the former Ondo governor to upscale his politics once again to the centre by aligning with the major opposition party, Mimiko rebuffed overtures to talk to his new political godson into stepping down for the PDP candidate, Jegede on the strength of the Party's spread and campaign funding (Sobechi, 2020: 23).

(c) The Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) Perspectives/Interests: Agboola Ajayi was a deputy-governor to the incumbent APC Governor Rotimi Akeredolu in 2016 governorship election in Ondo State and been a member of APC. His ambition to become governor, started when governor Rotimi Akeredolu was suspended by the national leadership of the APC, Ajayi found Solace in the alleged suspension to lubricate his ambition to supplant Akeredolu. Another fearful scenario Akeredolu survived was his ill-health in 2019 when he was away for almost three months. His return to base after about three weeks of rest in Abuja rather than easing tension, exasperated it as the state was sharply divided into the Aketi/Ajayi camps.

The fear of Ajayi, touted as grassroots politicians dumping the APC was most palpable, but it finally happened after denial, when the deputy governor dumped Akeredolu and APC for the PDP. However, before his decamp to PDP, the State Assembly moved a motion of impeachment against him but the threat did not see the light of the day, because of his grassroots support. Ajayi contested PDP primaries, but he was defeated by Eytayo Jegede who became the flag-bearer of PDP for governorship election. The then deputy-governor, Ajayi was not satisfied with the conduct of the PDP Primaries, so he equally dumped PDP and went to Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) and became the flag bearer of the party. The decision of Ajayi to align with the former governor, Olusegun Mimiko-led ZLP, opened a fresh chapter of tension and apprehensions in the state.

While reviewing ZLP performance in the October 10, 2020 Governorship Election in Ondo State, the camp of the then Deputy Governor Agboola Ajayi who ran as the gubernatorial candidate of the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP), said that they were robbed of victory. The party argued that, while the All Progressives Congress Party (APC) used the machineries of the state to stampede supporters of the deputy governor into staying away from the polling units on Election Day, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on its part, went to town with fake news of Ajayi's quitting of the gubernatorial race. All these worked against the party's victory of winning the governorship election in Ondo State. The party declared that, it was not free and fair race at all.

Nevertheless, it is not best of times for Ajayi as his failure to win the governorship race on the platform of his new party (ZLP) has robbed him of the support of many of those who before now stood by him in his struggle to avoid being shown the way out of the government house. His support base within and outside the government has reduced drastically. As things stand now, many of those who were hoping he will humiliate Akeredolu by emerging governor-elect while still in office as deputy governor were disappointed by his loss at the October 10, 2020 governorship election in the state.

The, then deputy governor, Ajayi filed a suit before a Federal High Court in Abuja in July 2020 to stop the impeachment move by the State House of Assembly. The State assembly began impeachment proceedings against the deputy governor last July following his resignation from the ruling All Progressives Party (APC) and defection to the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Ajayi, through his counsel, Olatoke filled the suit seeking to stop the impeachment process and to enforce his fundamental right of association (Dare, 2020: 28).

RESEARCH METHODS

A research design is a scientific logic that has a link with the data collected with appropriate analytical tools already specified and adopted under methodology. The discussion constitutes a major task that would largely determine the relevance of the work (Obasi, 1999:106). However, in a descriptive study such as this, its findings must be credible. The key criterion or principle of a good documentary research is found in the notion of trustworthiness and neutrality of its findings or decisions (Bouma and Ling, 2014). Just as a quantitative study cannot be considered valid unless it passes reliability and credibility tests: Trustworthiness entails credibility and transferability, which is the extent to which the findings can be explored in another contest (Bassey, 1981:73-94).

These qualities of a good methodology will help to explain the impact COVID-19 Pandemic could place great stress on societies and political systems, creating the potential for new outbreaks of violence. All governments face hard choices about how to manage the virus. These are universal problems but if the disease spreads in densely packed urban centres in fragile states, it may be virtually impossible to control. This is because any country that has weak health institutions, may be hard to persuade populations with little trust in government or political leaders to follow public health directives.

However, many governments seem confused by the spread and danger of the outbreak especially the second phase of the pandemic that has infected some political elites, both in the developed and underdeveloped societies. This thesis, will help us to unearth the effort of the stakeholders and Election Management Body (EMB) in this period of COVID-19 Pandemic to conduct Governorship Election in Ondo State that would be adjudged to be credible, free and fair.

The technique of Content Analysis (CA) will assist us to draw some relevant information or facts that will help validate the research hypothesis. The technique is a scientific means or process of analyzing or comprehending information or facts scientifically. It is a universal process of carrying out a research work in order to generate a detailed knowledge of the work under study. This technique will be used to analyze the data collected.

Content Analysis

S/N	Speech/Interview	Number of Paragraph	Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic in Off-Cycle elections
1	The speech of Director of IMF's African Department, "COVID-19: Africa Needs \$110 bn Lifeline Urgently", <i>Daily Sun</i> , June 30, 2020.	5	4
2	Interview of Human Right Activist (HRA) and former second Vice-President Nigeria Bar Association (NBA), COVID-19 Lockdown: Security Agents should be more humane", <i>Daily Sun</i> , April 30, 2020.	16	14
3	Interview of Governorship Aspirant of PDP in Ondo State, Otumba Benson Bamidele Akingboye, "Why I want to govern Ondo State", <i>Daily Sun</i> , June 23, 2020	8	7
4	The speech of Sultan of Sokoto, Sa'ad Abubakar, during, "a Peace Pact agreement signed by APC, PDP and ZLP governorship candidates in Ondo State", <i>Daily Sun</i> , October 7, 2020	7	6
5	The speech of Governor of Borno State, Babagana Zulum "he charged the military to leave internal security during the Ondo Election and concentrate more on counter-insurgency operation in the North East", <i>Daily Sun</i> , October 7, 2020	4	3
Total		40	34

From the table above, the empirical research shows that out of 40 paragraphs that focused on the conduct of governorship election in Ondo State, 34 emphasized on the issue of COVID-19 Pandemic as the year 2020 will surely go down as a defining and very challenging year in the conduct of elections by the Election Management Body (EMB). The empirical research findings was that despite extra-cost INEC had to incur to adjust to the realities of COVID, the attitude of voters in the post pandemic elections conducted by INEC showed general non-compliance to key protocols for preventing further spread of COVID-19 Pandemic.

The attitude of the vast majority of voters during the two-off-cycle governorship elections in Edo and Ondo States made a mincemeat of whatever efforts INEC had put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 Pandemic. In fact, adherence to the protocols was reduced to the partial wearing of face masks, just as voters defied rules for social distancing by continuing to stay within close range of one another. The major take away from INEC's exertions to prevent COVID is the fact that the populace was not interested because they did not really subscribe to the notions about the lethal nature of the virus.

The entire electoral process had to grapple with the realities of the new normal as imposed by the outbreak of the novel Corona Virus (COVID-19). The Pandemic forced INEC to quickly return to the drawing board with the objective of working out strategies to ensure the electoral process does not become a super-spreader point, which could go on to multiply the number of COVID-19 Pandemic fatalities. In fact, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had to initially postpone senatorial bye-elections in Bayelsa, plateau and Imo States in the wake of the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020. Electoral Act 2010 as amended in Section 26 (2) empowers INEC to postpone an election "where there is reason to believe that a serious breach of the peace is likely to occur if the election is proceeded with on that date or it is impossible to conduct the elections as a result of natural disasters or other emergencies (Ajanaka, 2020: 26).

Moreover, prevention is better than cure applies to COVID-19 Pandemic. The non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs)/COVID-19 Pandemic Mitigation measures include social distancing, social solidarity, self-isolation and mass gathering restrictions, others are lock-down of countries, industries, schools, business, Economics and stay at home/shelter-in-place etc. "Containment" includes Testing/Diagnosis and isolations/Treatment. "Mitigation" includes Tracing/Tracking and Quarantine. "Universal and specific Precautionary Measures are impactful: proper hand-washing technique/Hand Hygiene/proper hand sanitizer use. However, use face masks when away from home and never use face shield without a face mask. The activities/engagements are now conducted in virtual, globally, there are virtual businesses, conferences, sports championships, webinars, Educational Sessions/Webchoos, Religions worships, Government Meetings, International global meetings etc (Eregie, 2020:31).

Understanding the Challenges of Pre-2016 and 2020 Off-Cycle Governorship Election in Ondo State and Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

One of the positive developments in the 2020 electoral process was in the fact that there was in place a policy framework, which provided a robust set of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 Pandemic during elections. As part of the general protective measures, the guideline outlined INEC's readiness to provide equipment and materials for voters to sanitize, just as hand held thermometers were deployed to check the temperature of voters in the polling units. Importantly too, the policy stressed the mandatory use of facemasks for all involved in the election process. The policy also mandated the disinfection of Smart Card Readers (SCR) after the finger print of each voter was read. There were also rules to ensure physical distancing, not only on Election Day, but also at related activities including stakeholders' engagement, and trainings (Ajanaku, 2020:26).

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reviewed the success and challenges of Edo State Governorship Election in September 10, 2020 and came up with certain electoral rules or policies in the conduct of governorship election in Ondo State, in October 10, 2020. The commission worked with the health authorities in order to continue to enforce safety measures at polling units, including the compulsory wearing of face masks and the provision of non-pharmaceutical interventions such as hand sanitizers and infra-red thermometers at polling locations and collection centres. All eligible voters during

the election, had equal opportunity to exercise their right to vote and be voted for. However, for this reason, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) translated and published the policy on conducting elections in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic as well as the voters' code of conduct into Braille.

The emergency of COVID-19 Pandemic in the electoral process was a disturbing and worrisome issues to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and to the entire citizens' of this country. For example, the Nigerians went to bed on Friday night, April 25, 2020 and woke up on Saturday morning, April 26, 2020 with the sad news that President Muhammadu Buhari's Chief of Staff Mallam Abba Kyari had passed away. He (Abba Kyari) tested positive to the novel coronaries on March 29, 2020, died of complications from COVID-19 disease. Jibunnoh (2020:30) agreed with other scientists that coronavirus enters the body through the respiratory tract-through the mouth or nose and into the lungs-so, to infect a person, it needs to bind to an enzyme found on the surface of respiratory cells. But once the coronavirus is actually in the body, it can get into the bloodstream, and from the bloodstream SARS- Cov-2 can travel to, and invade, other organs and attacks them too.

However, the COVID-19 Pandemic came as the proverbial thief at night, derailing, stopping, upturning, snuffing out lives, and generally made nonsense of plans, calculations and targets. Nobody was spared, only that it hit a few more than others. When we heard about developments in China about a certain virus, at first, China looked very far away and nobody ever imagined how this virus was going to cross transnational boundaries to impact our lives – the rich, the poor irrespective of religion, colour, nationality or social standing. Our routines have changed and keep changing as our lives are up heaved by the changes brought by COVID-19 (Ovueraye, 2020:3). The COVID-19 Pandemic remains a monumental human disaster in the year 2020, many lost loved ones and some even, whole family, many lost their jobs, and businesses.

COVID-19 has brought in its trail global misery, fear, death, anxiety and deprivation. The rampaging coronavirus exposed how vulnerable the world had become and the limitations of our singular trust in scientific advancements. The pandemic has globally affected the day to day life of people. The world has been gripped with palpable fear and hopelessness. To curtail the spread of the virus, the world was brought to a standstill. Factories, offices, transportation system, schools, holiday centres, stadia, and worship places were closed down. The situation was described as the greatest calamity the world had faced since the Second World War. As millions of victims were infected, thousands died daily on their hospital beds, in isolation centers and their homes. The other victims of the pandemic were millions of poor people who mostly lived on daily incomes but were deprived of their livelihood by the lockdown. In Nigeria, the cry of starvation was everywhere and the government could not reach-out to its suffering citizens because of corruption, insincerity, selfishness and ineptitude. Most of the palliatives bought by the government for the poor we recently discovered were hijacked and hoarded in warehouses across the country while the ordinary people, women, children, the sick and elderly starved (KSM Magazine, 2020 Editorial).

In pre-2016 Off-Cycle Season Governorship Election in Ondo State, the candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Oluwarotimi Akeredolu (SAN), was declared winner. He polled a total of 244,842 votes to defeat other contestants in the race to the Alagbaka Government House, Akure. His closest rival and the candidate of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), Eyitayo Jegede (SAN), came second with 150,380 votes, while Olusola Oke of the Alliance for Democracy (AD) got 126,889 votes to place third. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) explained that Akeredolu scored the highest number of votes cast and secured more than the statutory requirement of 25 percent of votes cast in two-thirds of the 18 Local Councils in the state. Given a breakdown of how the leading candidates fared in the election, INEC's Chief Returning Officer, Prof. Abdulganiyu Ambali, said, that Akeredolu won in 14 Local Councils while Jegede and Oke won in two local council each (Daily Sun Editorial, 2016, Dec. 2: 15).

The Pre-2016 Off-Cycle Governorship Election in Ondo State were generally adjudged as peaceful free and credible by local and international observers. It was good that it did not witness any major untoward incident. The Poll was, indeed, an improvement on previous elections in the state and some other parts of the country that were marred by electoral violence and other malpractices. Report on the election showed that the law enforcement agents, including the police, the Civil Defence Corps and the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) officials, prevented the breakdown of law and order in all polling units in the state.

You would recall that the bad blood generated in the aftermath of the pre-2016 APC governorship primary caused sharp division within the ranks of the party as Akeredolu was accused of only rewarding those in the Aketi team. Akeredolu was accused of not doing anything to unite the party. He was also said to be running a

government of father, mother and son as well as giving contracts to his friends from Ibadan and outside the state. Before the 2019 general elections, the Ondo APC held parallel congresses with the governor's faction producing Adetimehin while the faction backed by the Unity Forum produced Idowu Otetubi. In the general elections, the Ondo State APC could not resolve its differences. Some of its members backed by Akeredolu contested on the Action Alliance (AA) platform. It was a colossal damage to the party as it lost the presidential election and two senatorial seats. Governor Akeredolu was later suspended from the APC for anti-party activities. To his opponents his suspension was a big ploy to deny him the second term ticket. The Unity Forum led by Former Deputy Governor, Alhaji Ali Olanusi, comprised of aggrieved APC chieftains who vowed that Akeredolu would not secure the party's ticket for a second term (Osagie, 2020: 32).

Despite the outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic in Nigeria, the political class in Ondo State Governorship Election had drum of warfare sounded even louder than they did in Edo State Governorship election. Several pre-election death cases was recorded, how political thugs continued to run riot, maiming, killing and wreaking havocs, leaving in their trail sorrow, agony and blood. There was high proliferation of arms and light weapons in the hands of the thugs that used them for wrong reasons. However, Ugwu (2020:13) said that, the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) leadership accused the All Progressives Congress (APC) of unleashing trained political thugs on other party members. They argued that APC was their biggest problem, and that at both Owo and Ondo, thugs suspected to be working for the APC disrupted, tortured and even killed their members during political rallies and made lives unbearable to the other political parties. However, despite the war drum by the political class in Ondo State Governorship Election, the security agencies and INEC was able to conduct free, fair, transparent and credible election.

In the October 10, 2020 Governorship Election in Ondo State, the incumbent Governor Rotimi Akeredolu of All Progressives Congress (APC) won re-election for a second term in office, defeating his closest challengers, Eytayo Jegede (SAN) of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) who polled 195,791 votes while the Zenith Labour Party (ZLP) Agboola Ajayi had a distance third, with 69,217 votes cast. The Chief Returning Officer, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan, Prof. Olayinka (2020:13) maintained that the candidate of APC polled the highest number of lawful votes, 292,830 votes cast, and had fulfilled all constitutional provisions regarding the election, thus was returned elected. The APC candidate won in 15 out of 18 Local Government Areas in the State. Below are the breakdown of election results between the three contending parties, APC, PDP and ZLP:

S/N	Local Government Area	APC	PDP	ZLP
1	Ese-Odo	13,383	4,680	4,760
2	Illaje	26,657	11,128	4,005
3	Odigbo	23,571	9,485	6,540
4	Ondo West	15,977	10,627	10,159
5	Okitipupa	19,266	10,367	10,120
6	Ose	15,122	8,421	1,083
7	Akuure South	17,277	47,627	2,236
8	Akoko South East	9,417	4,003	2,004
9	Idanre	11,286	7,499	3,623
10	Owo	35,957	5,311	408
11	Akure North	9,546	12,263	1,046
12	Ondo East	6,485	4,049	3,221
13	Akoko North West	15,809	10,320	3,477
14	Akoko South East	21,232	15,055	2,775
15	Akoko North East	16,572	8,380	3,532
16	Irele	12,643	5,493	5,904
17	Ile Oluji Oke Igbo	13,278	9,231	1,971
18	Ifedore	9,350	11,852	-
	Total	292,830	195,791	69,217

Source: Daily Sun October 12, 2020 P. 1

Finally, the Governorship Election in Ondo State has come and gone, but the situation demands that our present crop of political class must rise up to the occasion of political maturity and quickly create the conducive electoral environment for the enthronement of true and genuine democratic principles and norms within the framework of the constitution. Moreover, in developing societies such as Nigeria, the wellbeing of the citizens largely depends on the extent to which the democratic institution is strengthened and sustained. Therefore, a major challenge which has remained persistent across the country; in quest for improving the electoral processes, is that of ensuring that political campaigns, election logistics and voting processes are characterized by high level of security without which free and fair elections would be a mirage.

CONCLUSION

In the year 2020, the world was under the monstrous grip of the coronavirus, in which rumours and speculations about the origin and nature of this invincible foe were rife, leaving data and science in the dust, where fear ruled the world. The situation in Europe, especially in Italy and Spain, was particularly dire as the virus overwhelmed their sophisticated medical systems. While researchers and scientists struggled to crack the pathogen, dead bodies that could not be accommodated in morgues began to spill onto church pews and public places.

Within two months of Nigeria recording the index victim, any lingering doubts that the virus had not come to play were settled when Abba Kyari, the president's Chief of Staff, died from COVID-19 related complications. Today, over 2,000 deaths have been recorded, out of 166,000 reported – frankly under-reported-infections. At first, the reports were statistics, then they became names, and not long afterwards, faces of people we know (Azu, 2021:28).

The year 2020 has been a very precarious, apprehensive and uncertain for people across the globe and this was the year the governorship election was held in Ondo State. The Returning Officer in the governorship election in Ondo State, Prof. Olayinka (2020:13) the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan declared that the governorship election held on the 10th day of October 2020 was contested and the following political parties received the following votes: APC: 292,830, PDP: 195,791 and ZLP: 69,127. He further declared that Oluwarotimi Odunayo Akeredolu of the APC, having satisfied the requirement of the law and scored the highest number of votes, is hereby declared the “WINNER” and returned elected.

In the light of the above, if Nigeria is a true democracy, it must be prepared to recognize, respect and uphold the tenets and fundamental principles of democracy, one of which is the right of citizens to express themselves freely, and their right to choose how they want to be governed. One of the greatest problems confronting Nigeria is the adoption of destructive style politics of might is right. It is all about failed political leadership that lacks ethical behaviour and moral responsibility. The government must halt the regular choice of violence to resolve local misunderstandings, or the use of intimidation, threats, and harassment as tools to unify the various-religious groups in the country. In every democracy, citizens have the inalienable right to question elected leaders, as well as the way the country is being governed. Accountability is an ongoing obligation every political leader owes the citizens.

The current instability and high levels of violence give the impression that Nigeria has turned into a theatre of war. Poor governance is partly responsible for that. Government apathy and insensitivity to people's feelings have heightened public anger. Failure to strengthen national security has emboldened criminal groups to set up their own fiefdom in which they rule as they desire. Anything else that deviates from fair and equitable treatment of citizens, regardless of their geographic location, ethnic origins and religious faiths, is guaranteed to disrupt the government's policy or agenda. Nigeria is facing disintegration and calls for self-rule by citizens who are unhappy with the way they have been marginalized, disenfranchised, denied their rights in their homeland and increasingly terrorized by agents of state who should provide security to everyone (Obijiofor, 2021:32).

However, all these are symbols of a failed state. A failed state is country that is unable to look after its national and international interests. It is a country that cannot provide for the basic needs of ordinary members of society. It is a country in which citizens work hard to destabilize state institutions. It is a country in which everything is falling apart and there is nothing to hold back or slow that descent into

anarchy. It is a country in which the government and the governed cannot agree on anything, including pathways to future economic and social development. It is a country that cannot conduct free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections to select national, state and local government leaders and regrettably, Nigeria epitomizes all these and more. We live in a nation of contradictions, where every day bandits, callous herdsmen and “un-known” gunmen and women hold citizens hostage in their homes, in their business places, in their places of worship and on the roads, both during the day and during the night (Obijofor, 2021:32).

Indeed, Nigeria is passing through a perilous time in her 60 years of existence. Nobody, not even the “seers” that flood the space with prophecies ever imagined the nation will deteriorate to this stage where animals are more valued than humans, as animals are killed with good reasons unlike humans nowadays. It began from Boko-Haram insurgency to abduction, banditry, presently ceaseless killings and destruction of public facilities. Nobody is safe, not even the poor or school children and everybody is trapped; civilians and security personnel are gunned down daily. This is outcome of prolonged abysmal system failure. This is because government failed to deal with the crisis timely and the terrorists ambushed citizens while asleep, raped their women, killed the men and abducted children, nothing happened. From there, they graduated to kidnapping for ransoms and banditry, nothing happened.

The government’s negligence particularly long-silence on the herdsmen onslaught, banditry and kidnapers across regions contributed to the rise in criminal activities. The fake national unity paved way to nepotism that tears the nation to pieces, since presently all service-Chiefs hail from one region, key appointments are lopsided favouring the same region leading to turmoil. Recently, the destruction of public assets, endless killings, kidnapping and other social disorders can only worsen the dented image of the nation and scare foreign investors from the country. This is while many key multinationals bypassed Nigeria to site their Africa’s headquarters in neighbouring countries which will open up those nation’s economy and create employment opportunities to their citizens. Moreover, no foreign investors will push its funds to a society with instability and criminal activities (Umegboro, 2021:12). We can conveniently deduce that if all elections are free, fair and credible there would not be any reason for discontentment amongst our people from the East, West, North, South et al because mutual suspicion/mistrust would have been considerably minimized if not totally eradicated from our politics, even during this period of COVID-19 Pandemic.

The insecurity in Nigeria is worrisome and taking different dimensions. The governor of Niger State, Bello (2021: 7) lamented on this development, that while government is strategizing on how to bring the security situation under control, especially kidnapping, some politicians were busy strategizing on how to make money from the whole sordid affair. According to him, that is why the situation is becoming more complicated because now you have a lot of interests, some people will come and meet you and say give us money so that we can go and bring them (abducted Islamic school children) back. He decried that, no successful kidnapping takes place without informants. They guide and tell them when to come and where to follow. They tell them the movement of security agents and in some cases ambush them.

However, the seventeen (17) Southern Governors met in Asaba, Delta, and agreed to ban open grazing in the southern Nigeria as a way to control and eliminate insecurity in the country. Ozekhome (2021:31) posited that, by banning open grazing, the governors are merely putting a stop to one of the greatest known sources of wars and terrorists convergence in their respective states. And that the governors’ call is part of their responsibilities to the people of their states as the main mandate of each and every governor is to protect the life and property of the people of the states they govern. It must be emphasized that the decision of the southern governors does not in actuality impede the rights of cattle rearers to own cattle. It merely limits their ability to openly graze on lands that are not theirs in the first place and inflict misery on the indigenous owners.

In the light of the above, considering the incessant cases of Boko-Haram killings, maiming, stealing, kidnappings, rape, banditry and robbery foisted on the southern part of the country, southern leaders have rightly taken it upon themselves to put into place laws and measures that will protect their citizens. To this end, it is safe to assert that individual rights to movement have not in any way been violated by the anti-grazing laws because the laws were enacted in the interest of public safety, public order, public

defence and public morality. The laws and the declaration are also to protect the peace, privacy and homes of southerners as highlighted in section 37 of the 1999 constitution. They are also for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other persons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 Pandemic outbreak which began in Wuham, China on December 8, 2019. The emergence of COVID-19 Pandemic in the electoral process was a disturbing and worrisome issues to the Election Management Board (EMB) in Nigeria, due to overwhelming health challenges of coronavirus in the conduct of governorship election in Ondo State. In the wake of COVID-19 Pandemic, the outcome of governorship election in Ondo State, was adjudged to be free, fair and credible. However, the electorates, the security agencies and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must be commended for this great achievement in the wave of COVID-19 Pandemic. The following recommendations are necessary for this research work:

- (1) The outbreak of COVID-19 Pandemic is a lesson to Nigerians and government to develop our health care system equivalent to those in the civilized societies. The government must provide and equip all the hospitals with the necessary health facilities that can still take care of health conditions of the citizens of this country. The Federal/State governments should be proactive in making sure that the COVID-19 Pandemic Vaccine (Astrazeneca) is fairly distributed to all citizens of this country.
- (2) The electronic voting is the trend all over the world and would eliminate thuggery and all the electoral fraud associated with elections in this country. The National Assembly should work on the law (Electoral Act Amended Bill 2021) as soon as possible and President Buhari should assent to the bill. Moreover, if electronic voting is adopted, it will improve substantially the electioneering and voting process and reduce the electoral malpractices because it will also reduce the chances of thuggery and related abuses of the electoral process. One of the significant benefits of e-voting system is the possibility for increased efficiency, because voters can submit their votes, and be reasonably confident that their vote would count.
- (3) The current insecurity in Nigeria such as Boko-Haram, Fulani and herders, banditry, kidnappings and unknown gun men instabilities must be checked and controlled by the government. The current instability and high levels of violence give the impression that Nigeria has turned into a theatre of war. The failure to strengthen national security by the federal government has emboldened criminal groups to unleash mayhem on the citizens of this country. The issue of open grazing should be handled carefully and diligently to avoid continuous crisis that may lead to dismembering of the country. We can still bind our wounds and live together in peace. But, it is incumbent on the Buhari government to first reinspire national cohesion and patriotism to give Nigerians a reason to die for their country. This is because very little will be achieved by spitting fire and clamping down on agitators for secession.
- (4) The Nigerian government should do everything possible to uplift many Nigerians from the circle of poverty. This is because a surge in insecurity over the past years has further slowed economic activity and left more people unemployed, fueling a vicious cycle of violence and criminality, and poverty in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Abubakar, S. (2020), "Election not Worth Human Lives, Sultan of Sokoto Warns", *Daily Sun*, October 7.
- Ajanaku, A. (2020), "INEC, New Normal and Nigeria's Quest for Credible", *The Guardian*, November 2.
- Akeredolu, R. (2021), "Akeredolu: There will be no Abandoned Project", *The Nation*, March 2.
- Anderson, J.E. (1977), *Public Policy-Making: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Press.
- Anyebe, A.A. (2018), "An Overview of Approaches to the Study of Public Policy", *International Journal of Political Science (IJPS)*.
- Azu, (2021), "COVID-19 Stories by Children", *Vanguard*, May 28.
- Bassey, M. (1981), "Pedagogic Research: On the Relative Merits of Search for Generalization and Study of Single Events", *Oxford Review Education* 7 (1).

- Bellow, A.S. (2021), "Politicians, Government Officials Aiding Bandits-Nigeria-Niger Gov", *Daily Sun*, June 16.
- Bouma, G.D. & Ling, R. (2014), *The Research Process*, USA: University Press.
- Buhari, M. (2020), "Akeredolu Floors Jegede Ajayi", *Daily Sun*, October 2.
- Dare, O. (2020), "Ondo: How Much Longer can Ajayi Remain in Office", *The Nation*, October 25.
- Dayo, J. (2020), "3 Persons Shot as Violence worsens 5 Days to Poll", *Vanguard*, October 5.
- Dayo, J. (2020), "Ajayi, Jegede, Olafeso in tight Race", *Vanguard*, July 23.
- Eregie, C.O. (2020), "COVID-19 Pandemic, Our Common Humanity and New Normal", *Mulumba KSM Magazine*, 28 (3).
- Huang, C. (2020), "Clinical Features of Patient infected with 2019 Novel Coronavirus in Wuhan, China", www.thelancet.com.
- INEC, (2020), *Manual for Election Officials*, Abuja: Kas Arts Service Press.
- Jegede, E. (2020), "Jegede serves Akeredolu Quit Notice," *Vanguard*, July 24.
- Jibunoh, N. (2020), "Natural Selection of the COVID-19 Kind (1)", *Daily Sun*, April 30.
- Mustapha, B. (2021), "COVID-19: Again PTF Warns of Possible Third Wave", *Daily Sun*, March 16.
- Obasi, I.N. (1999), *Research Methodology in Political Science*, Enugu: Academic Press.
- Obijiofor, L. (2021), "Nigeria: when Things Fall Apart", *Daily Sun*, June 1.
- Oladesu, E. (2021), "Akeredolu: There will be no Abandoned Project", *The Nation*, March 2.
- Olayinka I. (2020), "Akeredolu Floors Jegede, Ajayi", *Daily Sun*, October 12.
- Onunaju, C. (2020), "Fighting COVID-19: Between Pandemic and Pandemonium", *Daily Sun*, April 30.
- Osagie O. (2020), "Akeredolu: Winning Against Odds", *The Nation*, October 26.
- Ovueraye, D. (2020), "Our Inherent Capacity to do Good", *Mulumba KSM Magazine*, 28 (3).
- Ozekhome, M. (2021), "Southern Governors' Asaba Accord to Rescue Nigeria's Sinking Ship (2)", *Daily Sun*, June 16.
- Secondus, U. (2020), "Kick Akeredolu Out, Secondus tells Electorate", *Vanguard*, October 8.
- Sobechi, L. (2020), "How APC Governments Beat PDP to Ondo Guber Poll", *The Guardian*, October 14.
- Ugwu, R. (2020), "Ondo Guber: Another Litmus Test for INEC", *Daily Sun*, October 7.
- Umegboro, C. (2021), "June-12: Democracy Day and the Proposed Revolution", *Daily Sun*, June 14.