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The media, electoral campaign rallies and government's hypocrisy of physical distancing in the COVID-19 era: The Nigerian experience*

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Abstract

Purpose: In several democracies an electoral campaign rally is a direct contact communication tactic politicians and political parties adopt to present themselves and their programmes to the electorate, with the ostensible aim of persuading these targets to cast their ballot for the party and its candidate. Through the media these mass campaign gatherings are relayed to thousands of voters outside the venues of these events. In fact, in several instances regular programming on TV has been suspended for live coverage of campaign rallies sponsored by politicians and their parties. Mediated images of mammoth crowds converged at campaign grounds is an eloquent testimony of the mobilisation and management prowess of campaign managers of politicians at an election time. But in the COVID era, it is disturbing, not only because of the health risks posed by such large gatherings in defiance of the state-run NCDC established COVID-19 protocols on physical distancing, but more worrisome that the same governments that have mounted public enlightenment campaigns on measures to check the spread of COVID-19 using billions of donor funds, and have threatened to sanction violators of COVID-19 protocols (and have in certain cases made good their threat) are behind these mass campaign rallies where physical distancing rules are violated. Therefore, the study analyses the health and political implications of electoral campaign rallies using the 2020 governorship election campaign rallies in Edo and Ondo States as case studies.

Methodology: A combination of semi-structured interview, personal observation and in-depth literature review was adopted to analyse the health and political implications of lawmakers becoming lawbreakers as it concerns the violation of public health rules in these campaigns by the incumbent governors of these states.

Findings: It was found that rallies can cause a spike in infection in society, as the Edo case has confirmed. Results suggest that to these governors winning a second term came first before the lives of citizens, and that politics, it appears, supersedes every other protocol, including public health protocols in the pandemic. Hypocrisy and negligence are implicated as causal factors in the conduct of these two governors. It is believed that these have bred the mistrust between government and citizens in Nigeria.

Unique Contribution and Recommendation: Digital electoral campaign is recommended to reduce physical contact that could endanger the health of citizens as a result of mass-attended election campaign rallies.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Campaign rally, Mass media, Government's hypocrisy, Physical distancing, Nigeria.*

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1.0 Introduction

Life has not returned to normal since the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 12, 2020 (Onwuka et al., 2020). The global health emergency has altered the ways of living and thrown the world into panic and confusion. The resulting job losses and global economic recession have increased human suffering. As of October 6, 2021 about 4.8 million deaths have resulted from the disease across the globe, with Nigeria's figure put at 2,731(www.statista.com). An already troubled world has been more troubled ever since.

In the political arena, COVID-19 has imposed obvious constraints on all governments and electoral bodies. Across the world, electoral bodies have introduced certain measures to ensure that the electoral process is not hindered by the pandemic. Among these measures is the rule on physical distancing at campaign grounds to protect all attendees from contracting the deadly corona virus that is currently ravaging the world.

But in Nigeria, electoral campaign rallies have gone on as though COVID-19 was a ruse. Mediated images of campaign ground in the pandemic era have depicted the usual mammoth crowds that characterised such events before the COVID outbreak. For instance, the electoral campaign rallies in the build-up to the Edo and Ondo States governorship elections in September and October 2020 respectively, politicians and political parties allegedly showed utter contempt for the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) protocols on political campaigns in the COVID season, particularly the rules on physical distancing and crowd attendance at campaigns.

More disheartening is the fact that those who allegedly breached these rules are the ones that should enforce them as key public servants that swore to an oath to ensure the protection and safety of lives and property. In both states, the incumbent governors, His Excellencies Mr Godwin Obaseke (Edo State) and Mr Rotimi Akeredolu (Ondo State) ran their electoral campaign rallies with mammoth crowd attendance, which was in breach of the physical distancing rules, prompting both the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to issue warnings to politicians to respect the physical distancing protocol at campaign grounds (Affe, 2020; Olokor et al., 2020; Omolaoye & Egbejule, 2020).

One is therefore constrained to ask: Does it mean the government does not believe that COVID is real? Is mass attended political rallies weighed higher on government's priority scale than the lives of citizens? Was it negligence or hypocrisy that afflicted these two governments (Edo and Ondo) when they exposed their citizens, and indeed the rest of the world to avoidable health risks in pursuit of their political ambition? The paper analyses the health and political implications of the action of these two state governors in Nigeria

2.0 The mass media and electoral campaign rallies

Elections are an integral part of democracy the world over. This accounts for why the clamour for free and fair elections is becoming more strident by the day, because a flawed election is a parody of the democratic process that throws up leaders at various levels of governance in a state. To woo voters, political candidates have often employed electoral campaign rally as a direct contact communication tactic to seek for votes, which ideally should decide who wins an election in a democracy. Paget (2019) identifies some features that distinguish the rally from other forms of political gatherings:

Publicness distinguishes the rally from internal meetings. The format of speaker and audience distinguishes the rally from other forms of campaign contact such as the canvass. It also suggests how to distinguish rallies from other mass political events such as marches and parade; insofar as they do not feature speakers addressing audiences, they are not rallies. The purpose of mobilisation distinguishes the rally from lecture and the sermon (p. 451).

Across the globe, the popularity of campaign rallies as a marketing tool of political candidates and their parties has been on the rise. In Britain, the campaign rally was popularised by the first Midlothian campaign in 1879 by William Gladstone. He was said to have addressed, in over 30 meetings, an unprecedented crowd of 90,000 people (Meisel, 2001). However, campaigns in the West became rally-intensive between the 1920s and the 1940s. Five years after the Gladstone campaign, in a Stanley Baldwin campaign rally, an estimated 200,000 people were present (Lawrence, 2009).

In America, Calvin Coolidge didn't adopt the rally in the 1924 campaign, but in subsequent elections, every Republican and Democratic candidate has used rally as campaign tactics until 1952 (Boller, 1996). Former President Donald Trump's campaign rallies did flourish even in the midst of COVID restrictions in 2020, leading to contested claims in the spike of COVID infections in the US (Steenhuysen & O' Donnell, 2020).

In the 2018 elections in Turkey, attendance at a rally was put at one million (Shaheen, 2018). An estimated half a million people attended a rally in India's 2019 campaign (Al Jazeera, 2019). In the midst of COVID-19, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi was quoted as expressing delight at the "unprecedented" large turnout of people at a rally he addressed in Asansol on April 18, 2021 (Roy & Singh, 2021). Some Latin America campaigns have incorporated rallies (de la Torre & Conaghan, 2009; Szwarcberg, 2012).

In Africa rallies are an important feature of the structure of many political campaigns, with Tanzania recording the most rally-intensive campaigns on the continent (Paget, 2019). Many critics believe high rally attendance can give politicians a false indicator of their popularity among the electorate. In politics rally grounds have become a critical site for political communication. Electoral campaign rallies have become an essential aspect of the perennial political communication goal of parties to generate and target the electorate (Epstein, 2018) with the ultimate aim of persuading and mobilising them (Nielson, 2012). Again, through rallies, politicians are able to attract and stylise news coverage (Cohen & Powell, 2005; Jones, 1998). The media extend the reach of campaign rallies by relaying them to a far wider audience outside the campaign ground, as well as documenting them for posterity. Media coverage further places campaign rallies at the centre of public discourse, giving audiences more opportunities to learn about candidates and their manifestoes.

In spite of the huge cost associated with running political campaigns, Nimmo (1970, p. 3) believes that "politicians are willing to spend these extravagant sums because of their strong belief that electoral campaigns can make or break political carrier, parties and programme." Yet the potency of political campaigns in influencing voting decision has remained contested (Rosenbery & Elliot, 1989; Blood, 1991; Gottlieb, 1992; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Devlin 1997; Berke, 2000;

Akpan & Nwankpa, 2012). However, this has not undermined its relevance to the entire political process (Akpan & Nwankpa, 2012).

Nigerian politicians are used to organising political campaign rallies in the build-up to an election. And crowd attendance has remained a consistent feature of these rallies, especially the presidential and governorship campaign rallies of the leading political parties with the financial muscle to mobilise mass attendance. It is crowd attendance at electoral campaign rallies in Nigeria at this time of the COVID-19 public health emergency, even with the deadlier variants, that has become a source of serious concern given the obvious health risks associated with mass gatherings.

3.0 Breach of COVID-19 protocols on physical distancing in the 2020 Edo and Ondo States governorship election campaign rallies

This section reviews the guidelines on electoral campaign in the COVID era as provided by the NCDC and the INEC. The guidelines (in bullet points) were lifted from the websites of the two government agencies. But focus in the analysis is more on the guidelines related to physical distancing. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, elections have taken place in countries such as Togo, Cameroon, Argentina, Canada, USA, Germany, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Czech Republic, Iran, Cyrus, France, Poland, Russia, etc., although with certain adaptations (IIDEA, 2022; Roy & Singh, 2021). In Nigeria, Edo and Ondo States governorship elections were held in 2020. The NCDC in response to the corona virus pandemic introduced measures or guidelines that would help curb the spread of the disease and equally reduce the risk of transmission of the virus during the elections if strictly adhered to. These guidelines are under listed:

3.1 Pre-campaign period: Sensitisation of communities and all politicians

- The pre-campaign period should be used to prepare for safe election processes, share messages about how campaigns will run and how people can vote on the day, while adhering to the COVID-19 protective measures.
- Posters, videos and jingles can be used to inform the electorate of the processes put in place to ensure that they are adequately protected.
- INEC and political parties with the guide of health authorities are expected to engage with communities and share information widely on what to expect at rallies and how people can vote safely. This period should also be used to share messages that promote behaviors such as hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette, practicing physical distancing to enhance the protection of healthy individuals, families and communities. Hence the following actions are advised:

3.2 For INEC

- Develop and publicise voters' code of conduct including what is expected of voters to adequately protect themselves from COVID-19 at polling stations.
- Educate all election staff and volunteers on voting process and measures put in place to protect them.
- Develop and publicise code of conduct for political parties including COVID-19 public health and social measures to be adhered to during campaigns and elections.

3.3 For Politicians

- Publicise and adhere to codes of conduct developed by INEC, including public health and social measures expected at rallies and election locations. This should be done through relevant communication channels - posters, TV and radio jingles. Based on the current risk level in Nigeria and the ongoing community transmission, the number of people gathering together should be limited to one-third of the actual capacity of the venue (minimum of 2metres should be observed among people at the gathering).
- Avoid utilising campaign venue to full capacity; we recommend one-third of venue capacity (minimum of 2metres should be observed among people at the gathering). If essential, multiple rallies should be conducted with appropriate numbers of people to enable adequate physical distancing in each gathering per time.
- Hand hygiene facilities including soap and water/ hand sanitizers should be made available for people before gaining access to campaign ground.
- The use of face masks must be mandatory for everyone attending the campaign rally. Where applicable, virtual campaigns and rallies are encouraged. This can be done using televised or radio campaigns, and mobile vans.

3.4 INEC Guidelines

- In addition to the preventive measures contained in the INEC Policy on Conducting Elections in the context of COVID, the Commission should engage all political parties to agree on the size of campaign and duration of same in line with the guideline of NCDC on mass gathering.
- The use of face masks must be mandatory for everyone attending the campaign rally. • Temperature checks should be carried out at the entrance/gate before any individual enters the campaign ground. Anyone with a temperature above 37.5°C should not be allowed into the campaign ground.

Despite all these proactive measures put together by NCDC and INEC to combat the spread of the Corona Virus during the Edo and Ondo governorship campaign rallies and elections, most of these guidelines were violated. Please see the following images of campaign rally grounds in the build-up to the 2020 Edo and Ondo States governorship elections in the midst of the COVID. From these images (Figures 1-6) you are the best judge as to what extent politicians and their parties complied with NCDC's and INEC's guidelines on social and physical distancing and crowd attendance at campaign rallies.



Figure 1: Governor Godwin Obaseki at a campaign rally in Ekpoma, Edo State. Photo credit: AIT Live.



Figure 2: PDP's Governorship campaign rally in Edo State. Photo credit: *BusinessDay*



Figure 3: APC Campaign Rally in Orhionmwon LGA Edo State. Photo Credit: Naira Land



Figure 4: APC's Campaign rally in Ondo State. Photo credit: *The Guardian*



Figure 5: APC'S campaign rally in Ondo State. Photo credit: Ripples Nigeria



Figure 6: A cross-section of the crowd at the PDP flag-off rally in Akure, September 12, 2020, for the Ondo governorship election. Photo Credit: Channels TV

Different reactions and opinions from individuals and parties were expressed when photos of the 2020 governorship campaign rallies in Edo and Ondo States started appearing on national TV stations and online channels. The INEC expressed deep worry and concern about infractions of the COVID 19 guidelines by parties at the rallies (Omolaoye & Egbejule, 2020). It was reported that not more than 20 per cent of the crowd in each rally centre wore face masks (Affe, 2020). There was also no physical distancing as required by the COVID-19 protocols (see Figures 1-6). The COVID-19 protocols for campaigns as spelt out by the NCDC and the INEC stipulate that social distancing and the use of face masks should be observed during public gatherings. But in a swift reaction, the Publicity Secretary of the PDP in Edo State, Chris Nehikhare, said the party had always “preached the use of face masks and social distancing before commencing campaigns in all the wards they visited” but noted that “some defiant supporters failed to heed the advice.”

In what analysts have described as a case of the kettle calling the pot black, Mr Crusoe Osagie, Special Assistant to the Edo State Governor on Media and Communication Strategy accused the APC of violating COVID-19 protocols at rallies thereby encouraging the spread of the disease in the state. He asked Edo people to hold APC responsible for the spike in COVID figures in the state (Omolaoye & Egbejule, 2020). It is instructive to point out that the Edo State Governor, Mr Godwin Obaseki, in a Gazette signed on May 28, 2020 banned political gatherings that could make direct primaries possible in the state, but after securing the PDP governorship ticket, took to mass campaign rallies across the 192 wards in the state (Affe, 2020).

4.0 Research Design

We monitored in 2020 the campaign rallies of two incumbent governors, Mr Godwin Obaseki of Edo State and Mr Rotimi Akeredolu of Ondo State, on two Nigerian national television stations (Channels and AIT) as both men sought to return to office for a second term in their respective states. Governor Obaseki (PDP) campaigned across the length and breadth of Edo State between June 21 and September 17, 2020 while Governor Akeredolu (APC) toured Ondo State between July 13 and October 8, 2020 during the campaign window provided by the INEC before the governorship elections.

Mediated images on both TV stations showed mask-less mammoth crowds thronged together at rally grounds in both states. Against this backdrop, we combined semi-structured interviews, personal observation and in-depth literature review to discuss the health risks and political implications associated with the alleged breach by the two governors with their campaign teams of both INEC and NCDC's guidelines on physical distancing in political campaign rallies in the COVID-19 era. Our approach resulted in triangulation of methodologies. This made up for deficiencies inherent on dependence on a single methodological approach. We interviewed two Nigerian public affairs analysts – a professor and a medical doctor – on the political implications of the action of the two governors and their campaign teams, and resorted to in-depth literature review to explicate the health risks associated with the breach. Personal observation provided deep insight that enriched our discussions throughout the paper and a veritable basis for verifying findings arising from the interviews. The two respondents were purposively selected based on their long years of experience as public affairs analysts on local radio stations in Nigeria as well as their several years of experience as authoritative Nigerian newspaper columnists. The interviews were conducted between September 28 and October 2, 2021. We adopt explanation building technique in our analysis.

5.0 Results and discussion

5.1 Health risks of electoral campaign rallies in the COVID-19 era

COVID-19, according to health experts, is a viral disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) (David, Scott & Keith, 2021). Since it was first identified following a respiratory illness outbreak in the Wuhan Province of the People's Republic of China in 2019 and reported to the WHO on December 31, 2019 (WHO, 2020), a lot has been done to study the virus and the disease it causes including its mode of transmission and prevention (Onwuka et al., 2020).

The principal mode of transmission is by inhalation of respiratory droplets carrying infectious virus generally within a space of six feet (≈ 1.83 meters). Others include by contact (transmission through direct [physical] contact with infected persons/surfaces) and airborne transmission. Based on the above identified modes of transmission, the WHO developed guidelines on its prevention which include regular proper handwashing or use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer when handwashing is not feasible, physical distancing (keeping a distance of at least six feet from others) when leaving home and use of face masks in situations where physical distancing is not possible. Non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) have been identified as the most important response strategy for delaying viral spread and reducing disease impact (David, Scott & Keith, 2021).

In order to halt or slow down the (community) spread of the virus, many governments adopted these guidelines: lockdown policies were instituted, large gatherings were prohibited, business owners and other institutions were made to provide soap and running water for practice of hand hygiene and the use of face masks in public places was enforced with penalties for defaulters. Though elections were postponed in the earlier months of the COVID-19 (more than eighty elections all over the globe were postponed due to the COVID-19, as reported by the IIDEA, 2022) with the hope that the virus would “go away” soon and normal life would return, the elections had to be re-scheduled eventually, albeit with major modifications to the electoral process when the virus persisted. Such modifications were aimed at limiting the spread of the SARS-CoV-2. While some governments placed restriction on gatherings (only about twenty to fifty persons were allowed in an indoor gathering while about fifty to hundred persons were allowed for outdoor gatherings), others banned public gatherings entirely allowing for only virtual meetings (IIDEA, 2021, 2022).

Political rallies fall into the category of large gatherings which were initially banned in most states during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020. The fear was that beyond spreading of ideas, these rallies would fester the spread of SARS-CoV-2. Was the fear justified? Were there studies that support the possibility of these fears having come to be? From logical reasoning, this fear is justified because the nature of political rallies is such that they are rife with conditions that encourage the spread of COVID-19: gathering of large numbers of people usually political enthusiasts with extremely high chances of direct person to person physical contact and failure to adhere to the two-metre rule of physical distancing, delivering of speeches to motivate the crowd which would usually inadvertently excite them, thereby eliciting reactions that may be verbal and consequently encouraging the spread of possibly infected respiratory droplets, participation of individuals who may have travelled from areas of high prevalence to be part of the rally, sharing of meals during the rallies, etc.

From studying trends in COVID-19 cases shortly before, during and after elections in various states, we also see that spikes in the incidence have been attributed to political campaigns. For instance, as a result of violations of campaign protocols as stipulated by Malaysia's electoral commission, the then caretaker Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin did admit that the recent spike in COVID-19 in his country was traceable to political campaign rallies preceding the Sabah State election which held on September 26, 2020. Reports indicate that ten politicians and three election officials were confirmed positive for COVID-19 after the elections. Twenty candidates contesting in the November 2020 Brazil Municipal elections died of COVID-19, while there were media reports about elections pushing COVID figures higher in France (IIDEA, 2021).

In Nigeria, there were two gubernatorial elections in 2020 (Edo and Ondo States) and the INEC adopted several measures to ensure that political parties and governorship aspirants were given the opportunity to canvass for votes in a safe way, discouraging the traditional method which involved gathering of large crowds for political rallies. To this end, aspirants and their supporters took to various social media platforms to woo voters. However, we also acknowledge the limitations of online dissemination of information in Nigeria especially among the rural community; network coverage and cost of accessing these services limit its effectiveness in the Nigerian setting. As a result, physical campaigns were also held.

These physical campaign rallies were characterised by absence of safety measures in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Physical distancing was not observed and face masks were barely used; the handful of people who had face masks had it covering their jaw rather than their nose and mouth (Affe, 2020; Channels TV, 2020, August 9 & October 7). The expected outcome would be increase in COVID-19 cases in these states during and shortly after these campaigns. But we can only objectively conclude based on data.

Data from the NCDC indicated that on June 30, 2020, a week after the commencement of the 2020 Edo State governorship election campaign, the state recorded the highest number of new cases – 119 new cases and nineteen days later the second highest number of cases for the state was recorded – 104 cases on July 19. See Figure 7.

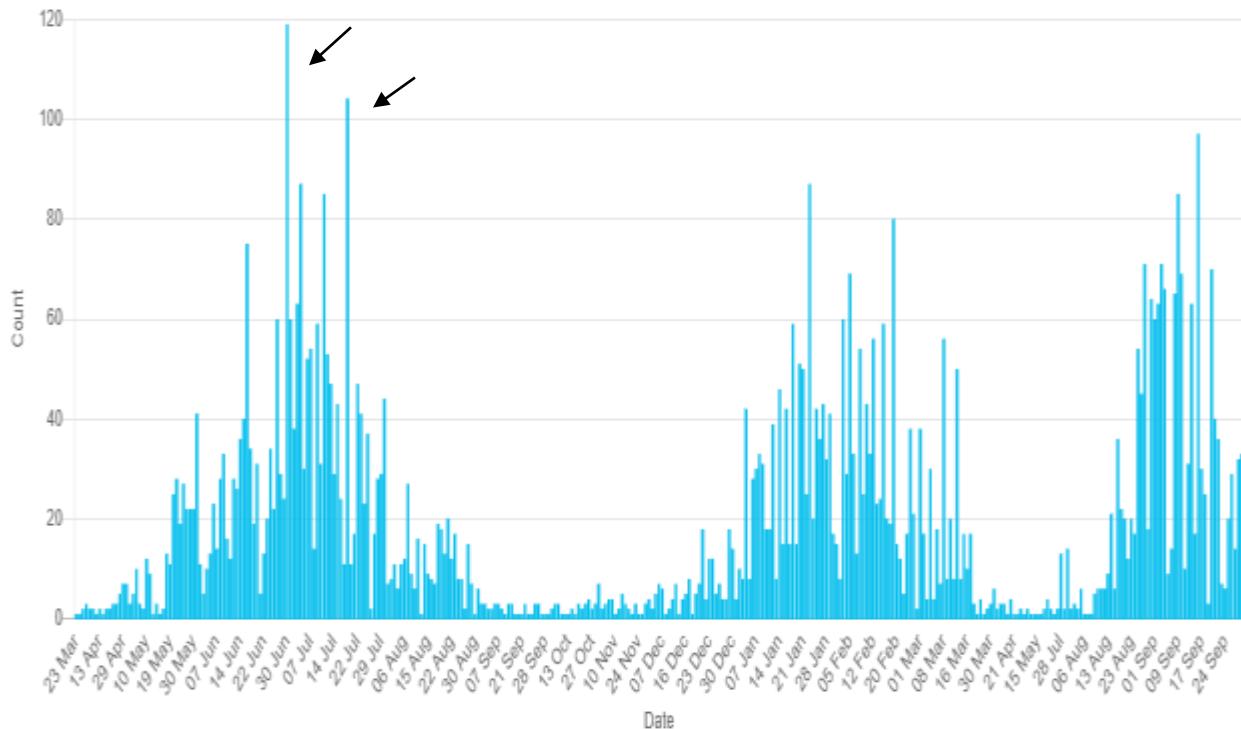


Figure 7: Epicurve of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Edo state; (the highest number of new cases in Edo state are represented above by the tallest bars (arrows) on June 30 and July 19 with 119 and 104 new cases respectively being a week and approximately four weeks after election campaigns commenced (Source: <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/state/>)

The second state that held governorship elections in 2020 was Ondo State. Similar conditions of non-compliance to COVID-19 safety protocols were observed. However, in contrast to the rise in the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the build-up to the election in Edo State, there was no rise during and shortly after the pre-election rallies and the election itself in the Ondo governorship election (Figure 8).

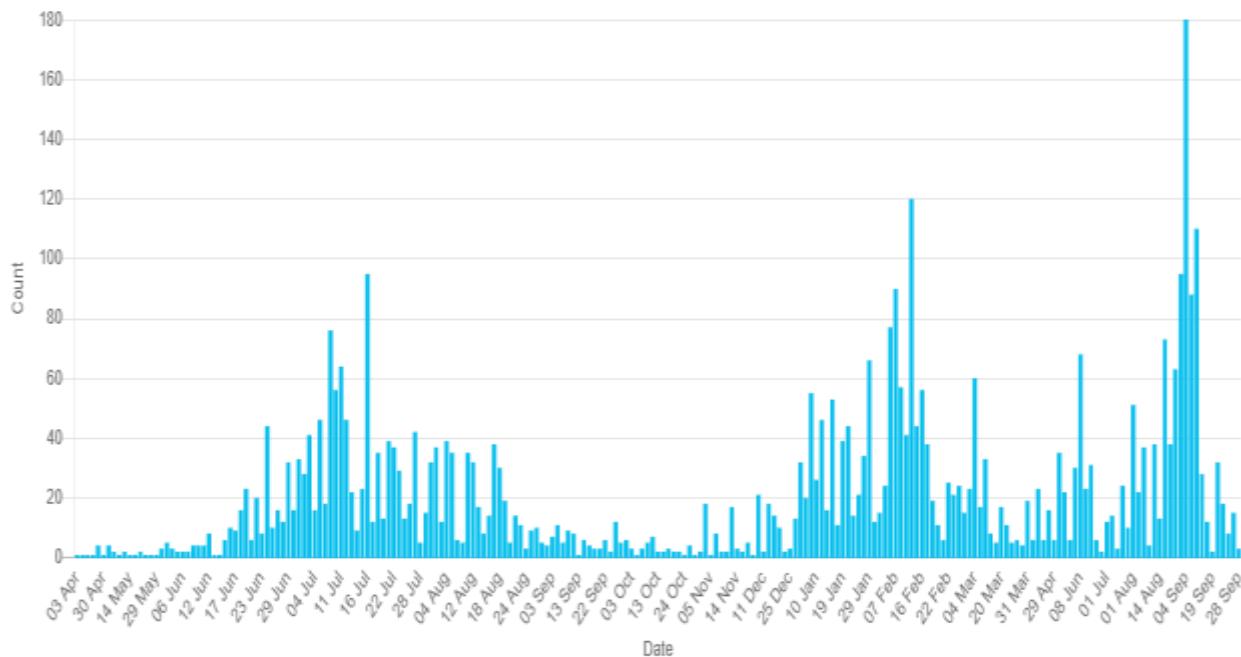


Figure 8: Epicurve of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Ondo state; Flag off of 2020 gubernatorial election campaigns in Ondo State held on September 5 and 12 for APC and PDP respectively and the election was on October 10 but we notice that contrary to expectation, there was no spike in the number of newly confirmed COVID-19 cases during and after this period till 2021 January (Source: <https://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/state/>)

This may be as a result of under-diagnosis or it may be that truly within the period under focus, there was low community burden of the virus and hence low infection rate. In conclusion, the health implication of political rallies where physical distancing is not maintained in the context of COVID-19 is unrestrained spread of the SARS-CoV-2 with increased burden on our already overwhelmed and ill-equipped health facilities. Medical experts have pointed to a “significant risk” of infection associated with standing in close proximity in crowded places such as a campaign rally ground (Menon & Goodman, 2021). This is supported by international data from Malaysia as well as local data from Edo State. We choose to attribute the data from Ondo State which does not support this to under-diagnosis and the average Nigerian’s proclivity for self-medication.

5.2 Political implications of electoral campaign rallies in the COVID-19 era

According to one of our respondents,

Generally, politicians everywhere believe in spectacle. There's always the feeling among Nigerian politicians that they are doing well and crowd sourcing is a way of establishing that fact. It's assumed that once a candidate can gather crowd at campaign ground, it's a reflection of the support they have. That's why politicians go that far. In an environment where there's so much poverty and unemployment, it's easy to rent a crowd, since it can put some money into people's pockets. It's also a reflection of our culture of lawlessness and indiscipline. Our

leaders are above the law. Again, many Nigerians do not believe COVID exist. So they are not afraid to attend such large gatherings called by politicians. There's this distrust between government and the people. People say the government is trumping up COVID figures to get more money from donor agencies.

Generally speaking, our politicians have not helped matters. They gather crowds at their events: funerals, parties, inauguration of projects, etc. So not many people will believe them when they talk about COVID. But there must be some kind of sanction for organising rallies in the COVID era. We need to sustain appeal to voters maybe through the media and do less of rallies that expose people to COVID infection.

Another respondent agreed that on government priority scale, political exigencies weighed higher than lives of citizens:

For instance, we've also noticed that some elections took place, some political rallies took place amidst all those COVID 19 regulations but the truth is just that most of these politicians are more interested in getting into offices than keeping citizens alive. So, I really think that in our country , most of our politicians pay more attention to political exigencies, getting into office than keeping citizens alive and that is the reason why you notice that in our country, when it comes to election, you even notice that some of these politicians don't pay attention to some of those guidelines and in fact they are actually the ones that come up with these guidelines but also just for political exigencies, they are the ones that flout some of these guidelines.

Of course, you know in Nigeria, politics is the biggest industry in our country and they (politicians) are willing to do anything to keep themselves in this industry and it's a very thriving industry. Of course, you know that COVID 19 has claimed the lives of so many politicians, including the Chief of Staff to the President, Abba Kyari. To even buttress my point, you notice that during the burial of the late Abba Kyari, they (government officials) flouted all the COVID 19 protocols. There was no social distancing, the people who participated in the process never wore any face mask, and even the people handling the corpse were very careless about the process. It's actually very true that in our country, politics supersedes every other protocol including the COVID 19 protocols.

Nigeria is however not the only country where COVID-19 safety protocols were violated for the sake of political campaigns. In the world's biggest democracy, in 2020, President Trump went about his campaign rallies with crowds attending in spite of the COVID restrictions. In India, "All political parties and their leaders violated COVID-19 norms – even those handling the MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs), central and state governments responsible for the implementation of the DMD (Disaster Management Act) (Roy & Singh, 2021, p. 7). In Malaysia, Myanmar, Moldova,

Poland, Malawi, Burkina Faso and several other countries where elections were held amidst the pandemic there were reports of disregard for public health measures put in place by health authorities (IIDEA, 2021).

On whether it is hypocrisy or negligence that has afflicted the government of these states, a respondent said,

My thought is that it is a combination of both hypocrisy and negligence. Hypocrisy in the sense that we as a nation claim to be doing the proper thing, meanwhile, we fail to adopt best international practices just like what other countries are doing and that's hypocrisy. Negligence in the sense that we know the proper thing to do but yet we refuse to do it. Failure to do what you're supposed to do having taken an oath to occupy an office can actually be termed as negligence; so you can see that it's actually an admixture of negligence and hypocrisy.

6.0 Conclusion/ Recommendations

As the study has established, rallies can cause a spike in infection in society, as the Edo case has confirmed. From the election campaign rallies monitored, one may be forced to conclude that to these governors winning a second term came first before the lives of citizens, and that politics, it appears, supersedes every other protocol, including public health protocols in the pandemic. Hypocrisy and negligence are implicated as causal factors in the conduct of these two governors. It is believed that these have bred the mistrust between government and citizens in Nigeria. Yet Nigerian politicians were at it again in Anambra State! A gubernatorial election was held in that state on November 6, 2021 and campaigns by the ruling APGA in the state were flagged off on September 25 at the Alex Ekwueme Square, Awka, the state capital with a mammoth crowd in attendance. Other political parties in the contest followed suit. The campaign rally fray was however slowed down by the sit-at-home order declared by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) that was meant to disrupt the election, before the order was eventually lifted at the eleventh hour by the secessionist group. It is high time in Nigeria's political history as a nation that the rule of law began to prevail, and lawbreakers were sanctioned irrespective of their status! But the sorry experience in Nigeria is that lawmakers are lawbreakers! Politicians who swore to an oath to protect and defend the law are in most cases the first to break them, maybe because they consider themselves to be above the law. Given the COVID-19 global health emergency the world is currently facing, Nigerian politicians (and their counterparts elsewhere) can consider more creative ways to engage voters without exposing them to avoidable health risks in the name of mass electoral campaign rallies. This is the time to consider digital electoral campaign, and make it feature more prominently in Nigeria's overall campaign structure.

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