



## Facebook Users' Attitude Towards Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and Organised Labour on Fuel Subsidy Removal in Southeast, Nigeria

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### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords: Facebook, Users, Perceptions, Resolution, Engagement, Fuel, Subsidy*

*Received : 5 April*

*Revised : 23 Mei*

*Accepted: 23 Juni*

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### ABSTRACT

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has sparked significant protests and discussions among numerous stakeholders in the Southeast region of the country, highlighting the critical role social media plays in shaping public opinion. This study examined how Facebook users felt about organized labour and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in relation to the elimination of fuel subsidies. It also analyzed the amount of debate and interaction that took place on the platform. The study sampled 398 Facebook users from a population of 18,763,730 in the states of Anambra, Enugu, and Imo using a survey research approach. A questionnaire was used as the main instrument for gathering data, and basic frequency distribution tables were used to analyze the results. The results showed a strong correlation between Facebook users' opinions about the resolution to remove gasoline subsidies and their preexisting beliefs. Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between Facebook's degree of debate and interaction and media monitoring, indicating clear ideological trends in users' responses to stakeholder engagements. In conclusion, Facebook has shown itself to be a successful communication tool that improves democratic engagement by enabling citizens and the government to engage on policy matters. This study emphasizes how social media, especially Facebook, shapes stakeholder participation and public conversation in Nigeria's policy environment. In order to strengthen Facebook's function in encouraging democratic involvement, it is advised that it be used more skilfully to produce thorough input on governmental policies

## **INTRODUCTION**

Facebook is one of the new (social) media platforms that has transformed the communication sector in today's global digital society. With the help of the robust networks of online communication, social media – including Facebook – has democratized and personalized the distribution, acquisition, and dissemination of information (Aondover et al., 2025). Facebook is a powerful and popular communication technology that has transformed the way people communicate and made the world more accessible (Vitalis et al., 2025). The concept of the "global village," first put forth by Canadian communication theorist Marshall McLuhan, is suggestive of the idea that the entire world is become more interconnected as a result of the globalization of media technology (Easa, 2019). McLuhan notes the everyday creation and consumption of media images and contents by audiences around the world in his works *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (1964) and *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) (Hendricks, 2018; Easa, 2019). Because the internet and other electronic communication links are bringing people from all over the world together, McLuhan coined the phrase "global village" to describe this phenomenon (Nwafor & Nwabuzor, 2021).

The multiplicity of far-reaching techniques of communication has two important results – in the first place, it increases the sheer radius of communication so that for certain purposes, the whole civilized world is made the psychological equivalent of a primitive tribe." This phenomenon was predicted by Sapir in his 1933 article on communication, which was cited in StanLaw (2024). In light of the aforementioned, Facebook has broadened the scope of who can produce and consume media material as a digital communication tool. Facebook's ability to read about, share, and respond to global issues, along with the corresponding speed of communication, has made it possible for people to get more involved with others and current social trends. With 3.07 billion monthly active users, Facebook, which was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, is currently the most widely used and largest networking platform globally (Kumar, 2025). This number corresponds to 37.81% of the world's population and 59.38% of all social media users worldwide (5.17 billion), according to Kumar (2024). According to these figures, Facebook is the preferred platform for millions of users, drawing in individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and interests.

In 2022, there were 271 million active Facebook users on the African continent; by 2025, that figure is expected to rise to 379 million (Saifadin, 2024). According to statistics, as of February 2024, 384 million people in Africa were active on social media, with Egypt, South Africa, and Nigeria having the highest rates of social media penetration (Saifadin, 2024). In March 2024, there were 49,991,400 Facebook members in Nigeria, making up 21.4% of the country's total population, according to Napoleon (2024).

Facebook's influence may be seen in many facets of people's lives as the number of monthly active users continues to rise. According to Dixon (2024), Facebook serves as a digital forum for the expression, discussion, and dissemination of ideas. Politicians and other organizations use the platform to

mobilize support, while regular citizens participate in political discourse, fostering a more participatory kind of democracy. In support of the aforementioned, Adewale et al. (2025) add that Facebook and other online communication platforms have raised people's awareness of global events and have provided information to audiences and people that were previously unreachable.

Facebook is a social media site that is typically used for sharing images and information, but it is also being utilized more and more for political and civic reasons. By making the process more public, Facebook has altered how people are governed, claim Schwartz, Kozier, Barnett-Itzhaki, and Romano (2024). According to Salfadin (2024), a lot of world leaders have used social media to express their views and top concerns, which has helped the public better understand the government they have chosen. Facebook is being utilized more and more as a genuine tool to increase democratic involvement in the creation and execution of policies because of its aforementioned capabilities. This explains why it is necessary to ascertain Nigerians' opinions regarding the 2023 gasoline subsidy removal crisis.

The sixteenth (16th) president of Nigeria, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, declared in his inaugural address at Eagles Square Abuja on Monday, May 29, 2023, that the fuel subsidy had been eliminated. He also stated that the 2023 budget did not include any funding for the fuel subsidy, so it had been eliminated. "On fuel subsidy, unfortunately, the budget that I have glimpsed before I assumed office and what I have heard is that there is no provision for subsidy," Tinubu said, according to a quotation from Opejobi (2023, P. 3). So fuel subsidy is gone.." The President explained that Nigeria can no longer afford to spend such a humongous fund on subsidy, at the detriment of other infrastructure, pointing out that petrol subsidy had increasingly favoured the rich more than the poor. In his words, the President states that:

The subsidy's steadily rising expenses in the aftermath of depleting resources can no longer be justified. Instead, we will redirect the revenues to more effective investments in public infrastructure, health care, education, and employment that will significantly enhance the lives of millions of people (The cable, 2023) Since it was first revealed, the fuel subsidy reduction program has caused a great deal of agitation, and the president's inaugural speech has dominated media coverage (Anunike & Onyejelem, 2024). However, Nigeria, a country that produces oil, has relied on imported refined goods for many years, and the government has paid for them. However, the government claimed that the fuel subsidies were no longer economically viable due to declining oil revenue, ongoing theft, and a decline in foreign investment. It estimated that in 2022, it allocated 4.4 trillion naira (9.5 billion dollars) for subsidies, which is significantly more than the combined budgets for infrastructure, health care, and education (TheCable, 2023). Reports from the Civic Tech-group Budgit revealed that Nigerian government spent 11.4 trillion on subsidy budget between 2015 and 2023 as shown below:

The Labour Unions threatened to go on strike in protest of the moves to remove subsidies. As a result, Nigeria was once again in the grip of growing dissatisfaction and a condition of oppressive distress that led to public demonstrations in a number of cities before an uncomfortable quiet ensued. In fulfillment of their pledge to urge Nigerians to oppose the federal government over the offensive policy measure that was choking them nationwide, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the two organizations that represent the nation's labor movement, organized a protest in Abuja, Lagos, and other locations on Wednesday, May 31, 2023. The protest took an unprecedented turn in Abuja, as they invaded the National Assembly, where they pulled down the main gate to gain access into the premises (The Cable News, 2023).

Daminabo (2023) claims that the NLC and TUC were negotiating a three-point demand, which included the rehabilitation of the nation's four refineries, the inclusion of labor in the oversight committee for these reforms, and a new national minimum wage of N200,000.00 per month. The labor unions gave the Federal Government until August 19, 2023, to resolve the issues at hand, according to Daminabo (2023). Despite this, Nigerian workers had also warned their members to go on strike right away if the Federal Government followed through on their threat to hold the labor leaders accountable for contempt of court for continuing to protest a decision made by the National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) (Kperogi, 2023).

It seems that dialogue, understanding, and trust are essential to the creation and application of policies. In the case that the government's policy is attempted to be resisted, they are also crucial in resolving engagement. Given that both parties signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), the NLC/TUC and the Federal Government's involvement over the fuel subsidy removal strategy has been delayed, which borders on a breach of trust and a weak social compact. Once more, the thirtyfive thousandnaira (35,000) wage award that was agreed upon for Federal Government employees is being applied in an epileptic manner and verges on trust. Additionally, a tripartite committee on a new national minimum wage – one of the three requests stated by the NLC/TUC – was established on Wednesday, January 30, 2024. Given the aforementioned, it is important to gauge the sentiment of the Nigerian media community regarding the settlement of the conflict between the Federal Government, TUC, and NLC. The study, titled "Facebook users' perception of the resolution of engagement between NLC, TUC, and the Federal Government of Nigeria over the fuel subsidy removal policy," was born out of this.

#### ***Statement of the Problem***

Given that the creation and implementation of policies necessitate a shared knowledge of the desires and aspirations of the population that the policy is intended to serve, the media are unquestionably effective tools of governance. This is due to the fact that successful government policies, programs, and activities are those that involve the general public in their development. Therefore, for any government program to be successful, a nationwide awareness campaign that aims to increase public understanding and support is essential.

This means that in order to formulate policies, the government needs work with important stakeholders, such as labor unions and civil society organizations. Facebook is a social media site that is often used to encourage citizen participation in politics.

Facebook is used by government organizations and agencies to rally support and buy-in from the public for government programs, policies, and initiatives. Additionally, people utilize Facebook to voice their support or disapproval of government policies, giving the government crucial input to help streamline her programs. The result of the 2023 announcement to remove fuel subsidies in this situation is the aftereffect if there is any disconnect in this procedure. Facebook so owes society the responsibility of truthfully reporting the incident, giving the public enough relevant information, and effectively directing and regulating public opinion. Facebook's portrayal of the topic (the elimination of gasoline subsidies) and the importance it places on the platform will have a big impact on how people feel about it when performing the aforementioned tasks. Given the aforementioned, the purpose of this study is to assess Facebook users' perceptions of the FGN and organized labor in relation to the elimination of fuel subsidies in Southeast Nigeria. The general sentiment of Facebook users on the decision made regarding the policy to remove fuel subsidies is still being empirically studied at this time. This study aims to close what is regarded as a knowledge gap.

#### ***Objectives of the Study***

This study's main goal is to assess Facebook users' perceptions of organized labor and the Federal Government of Nigeria in relation to the policy of eliminating gasoline subsidies. The following are the specific research goals:

1. To determine the degree of awareness among Facebook users in Southeast Nigeria about the FGN and organized labor's involvement in the program to remove fuel subsidies.
2. To ascertain how Facebook users' attitudes in Southeast Nigeria are impacted by organized labor's position on the elimination of gasoline subsidies.
3. To evaluate the impact of public remarks and deeds on Facebook users' perceptions of FGN and organized labor in relation to the elimination of gasoline subsidies in Southeast Nigeria.

#### ***Theoretical Framework***

The agenda-setting theory and the Social Responsibility theory were the theoretical foundation for this study.

*The Agenda Setting Theory:* According to Asemah et al. (2017), Maxwell McCombs and Donald Lewis Shaw formally developed the agenda-setting theory in a study on the 1968 presidential election known as "the Chapel Hill study," which showed a strong correlation between the opinions of one hundred Chapel Hill residents regarding the most important election issue and what the local news media presented as the most important issue. According to Asemah et al. (2017), McCombs and Shaw assess the extent to which the media influences the public by contrasting the importance of topics in news reports with popular opinion. According to the argument, the media greatly influences its audience by telling them what they should think about rather than what they truly think.

That is, the public will view a news story as more significant if it is covered regularly and prominently. According to the thesis, the media are crucial in influencing the issues that draw the attention of governments and international organizations and sway public opinion toward particular issues because of their capacity to recognize and publicize issues. By deciding which subjects receive the greatest attention, the media can also influence public opinion, according to the argument. The media has an impact on how news stories and subjects that affect public opinion are portrayed. It is predicated on the idea that most individuals only have access to one source of information on most issues: the news media. Since they establish the agenda, they may affect how important some things are seen to be.

Cornway-Silva, Filer, Kensko, and Tsetsi (2018) explain that the agenda-setting process is described by the three models, as proposed by McCombs. That include:

1. Awareness Model
2. Priorities Model
3. Salience Model

This study is appropriate for the agenda setting hypothesis. For information on the outcome of the interaction between the NLC-TUC and the federal government, the audience heavily depends on the media. The audience's views and attitudes on the topic will be influenced by what the media report on it.

### ***Social Responsibility Theory (SRT)***

One could argue that the Hutchins Report, "A free and responsible press—a general report on mass communication, newspapers, radio, magazines, and books" (West and Turner, 2018), served as the inspiration for Social Responsibility Theory, or SRT. At a point in American journalism history when press barons like Henry Luce realized that government regulations on yellow journalism were imminent, the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press was founded in 1947 and funded by Luce of Time magazine (West and Turner, 2018). The Commission's Chairman, Robert Hutchins, who was also the Chancellor of Chicago University at the time, had the support of twelve other professionals with specialized knowledge. Two volumes of the report were published: one on newspapers and the other on other media. The commission concluded that the less affluent classes' informational and social demands have not been satisfied by the free market approach to press freedom. In actuality, it had given one class more power. Diverse points of view were not well expressed. The rise of television, cinema, and radio further indicated the need for some form of responsibility and public control. As a result, the SRT was founded on the idea that the media had a duty to society to meet its needs, not just those of the free market.

According to this notion, the media should be pluralistic, represent the plurality of society, and provide access to a range of viewpoints, including the opportunity to respond. Therefore, the theory acknowledges the press's function in supporting the political system by educating the public and defending individual liberties, but it expresses the belief that the press has fallen short in

both areas. Although it acknowledges the press's contribution to the economic system, it would not allow this role to supersede other duties like advancing democratic processes or educating the public. It acknowledges that the press can provide amusement, but only if such entertainment is of high quality. It accepts the need for the press as an institution to remain financially self-supporting but if necessary it would exempt certain individual media from having to earn their way in the market place.

The idea is appropriate for this study since the public must be objectively informed during the entire engagement process between the NLC-TUC and the federal government. The public needs thorough and impartial reporting in order to generate well-informed opinions about the topic.

### *Conceptual Discussion*

#### **Fuel Subsidy in Nigeria**

Ten years after the first crude oil resource was discovered, in 1966, the newly independent Nigerian state was beset by ethnic strife, a lack of legitimacy, and many coups. To keep its residents' fuel products inexpensive, it implemented fuel subsidies. The fixed-price system is susceptible to global price swings, according to Anunike & Onyejelem (2024), and every Nigerian administration since 1978 has attempted to eliminate or modify subsidies, usually in response to labor-led demonstrations.

Olusegun Obasanjo, the military head of state, increased the price by 74% in 1978, marking the first adjustment. However, there was no protest (Ibrahim and Unom 2011). This could be because people's economics was not impacted by fuel prices as much as other citizen rights and social welfare. The goal of labor suppression is to get around the unions' potential ability to strike and organize in big numbers and across regions. When workers in the crucial oil industry are involved, a strike poses a challenge to the political and economic elites because it has the potential to stop production and disrupt capital flows (Viinikka and Zeilig, 2009; Houeland, 2015; Houeland, 2018a).

The level of labor-led opposition to the elimination of fuel subsidies has been "unprecedented" since 1999 (Nwoko, 2018, p. 148). President Obasanjo (1999–2007) made six attempts to eliminate the subsidy, but labor-led opposition always defeated him. After that, there was a period of "subsidy peace" under President Umaru Yar'Adua (2007–10), whose administration had little support from the general public. The 2011 elections saw even more violence and corruption, and the 2007 elections were seen as more tainted than the two before ones. Additionally, President Jonathan's administration (2010–15) lacked democratic legitimacy.

Nigeria's economy grew by 8.6% on average between 1999 and 2010 as a result of the worldwide oil boom (Orji and Melber, 2016). However, this expansion was accompanied by an increase in poverty and inequality as well as a failure to develop social welfare. In 2011, the oil business accounted for 80% of state revenue; 85% of oil wealth went to 1% of the population, while the "unimaginably poor" lived amid the ostentatious consumption of the elites (Watts Behrends, Reyna and Schlee, 2011, p: 63). Subsidy expenditure expenditures grew as a result of rising global oil prices and years without fuel price adjustments. In 2011, fuel subsidy expenses accounted for one-third of

Nigeria's national spending budget. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Minister of Finance, declared in October 2011 that the subsidy would end in April 2012. The anticipated response from the labor unions and other civil society organizations, such as the recently established Occupy Nigeria, was to threaten resistance and launch widespread strikes. When President Jonathan took away the subsidies on January 1, 2012, the government replied with bilateral discussions that had not yet been completed. The next day, protesters took to the streets. After calling a meeting of the National Executive Council, the NLC announced a countrywide strike that would begin on January 9.

Compared to the earlier post-1999 strikes, the 2012 fuel subsidy demonstrations were bigger and used new forms of mobilization outside of trade unions (Houeland 2018 a; Orji and Melber, 2016). But according to Osuoka (2020), the strike was "fundamental" to the protesters' success. President Jonathan only asked the unions to discuss after PENGASSAN threatened to stop production on January 12, highlighting the significance of unions once more. Following two days of talks, the unions put a stop to the strike, the president restored the subsidy, and a new fuel price of 97 naira (US\$0.60) per liter was announced (Houeland, 2018a).

The dynamics of removal and resistance have changed, even though Nigerians still view gasoline subsidies as an inherent component of the social compact (McCulloch et al., Moerenhout and Yang 2020). President Buhari originally enjoyed greater popular legitimacy, and the 2015 elections were regarded as the most democratic to date (Lewis and Kew Reference Lewis and Kew 2015). Buhari's popularity has plummeted, nevertheless, following two oil recessions (2015 and 2020), inflation, decreased state revenues, heightened insecurity, and little progress in combating corruption. There haven't been any fuel subsidy strikes, but fuel prices have fluctuated and fuel subsidies have been taken away and then put back in place multiple times. When petrol prices rose to 145 naira in May 2016, the NLC called for a protest, but few people showed up. The Buhari government that came into power after the 2015 elections insisted that there had been no subsidy removal and continued to argue against reform (McCulloch , Moerenhout and Yang 2020); many activists from the 2012 protest supported him (Houeland 2020a).

Buhari reduced the price of petrol when global oil prices fell in early 2020, but inflation soared and the selling price jumped to 161 naira by September. The unions only threatened to go on strike after civil society actors picketed the NLC's offices to pressure it into taking action. Following an agreement between the NLC and TUC and the government wherein the unions agreed to the initial deregulation of fuel prices, the strike was put on hold. The #EndSARS youth demonstration against police violence surfaced around that time, and many people thought it was bigger than the 2012 event. The gasoline subsidy was only partially integrated as a problem, and unions only provided sporadic and tardy support (Houeland 2020b). However, the NLC viewed the price increase in November 2020 as a violation of the terms of their September agreement and prepared to go on strike once more. The administration insisted by August 2022



that subsidies were in place and that the price rises of up to 218 naira that had been reported were not authorized by the government (Ukpe 2020).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Empirical Review*

In a paper titled "The Aftermath of the Conflict on Fuel Subsidy Removal in Nigeria," Oghajofor, Anyim, and Ekweoba (2014) described how the Federal Government of Nigeria's decision to remove the fuel subsidy on January 1, 2012, sparked a number of protests by the Labour Movement, civil society organizations, human rights activists, and other groups. Eventually, the problem escalated into a full-fledged strike that lasted for six days in a row. The reasons put up by supporters and opponents of the elimination of gasoline subsidies, the roles performed by the various stakeholders before to and during the strike, and the financial losses sustained by the nation during the dispute were all analyzed in this study. The study also assessed the bribery scandal and subsequent developments after the House of Representatives Ad hoc investigative panel report on the oil subsidy regime was submitted. Using a historical review methodology, the paper found that the strike severely disrupted the nation's economic activity during that time. The study suggested that enough consultations be conducted prior to the creation of a policy of this magnitude. This reviewed paper's weakness is that it was founded on the author's opinions and was centered on strike action. The results of an engagement between NLC-TUC and the Federal Government served as the foundation for the current study.

In a paper titled "Between the Street and Aso Rock\*: the role of Nigerian trade unions in popular protests," Houeland (2018) critically analyzed the stances, behaviors, and interactions of the trade unions during those protests to remove gasoline subsidies. The paper's background is that, although the trade unions' crucial role in the four decades of successful public opposition to the elimination of subsidies is widely acknowledged, it is not fully appreciated since labor particularities are not taken into account. Houeland (2018) asserts that the 2012 subsidy protests, also known as Occupy Nigeria, were one of the biggest popular mobilizations in Nigerian history and that they are seen as a gauge of Nigerian politics. This case study is based on literature and media analysis, as well as interviews with union leaders and other key actors in the protests during field visits in 2012 and 2013.

With over four million members, mostly blue-collar workers, the NLC is the biggest and oldest trade union confederation. The two oil workers' unions, the TUC-affiliated PENGASSAN (Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria) with roughly 20,000 members and the NLC-affiliated NUPENG (Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers) with roughly 10,000 members, are also mentioned, along with the TUC, which has roughly 300,000 members who work in white-collar jobs (Houeland 2015). The article's findings demonstrate how trade unions' agency is both naturally limited and has the potential to be quite strong. Additionally, this paper demonstrates how the unique combination of trade unions' external circumstances, internal capabilities, and strategic decisions both creates and restricts opportunities and carries with it inherent conflicts. Through the use of their associational power to organize,

mobilize, and represent members; their structural power to disrupt the economy; and their institutional power to access and negotiate with governance institutions, the unions played a crucial role in enforcing the reinstatement of the fuel subsidy. The paper does, however, also highlight ideological and practical limitations on unions' agency or capacity to exercise these powers. As a reminder that unions' priorities carry inherent contradictions, tensions emerged with regard to each of their three main arenas – the state, the greater community, and the market – as they pursued a policy of alliance with a larger community and aggressive activities against the state. The gap herein is that there was no engagement between the NLC-TUC and the Federal Government in this essay, and there were no resolutions. This gap is filled by this present paper.

In his article "The social contract and industrial citizenship: Nigerian trade unions' role in the recurring fuel subsidy protests," Houeland, C. (2022) examined the role of Nigerian trade unions in the recurrent fuel subsidy protests. He added that since the mid-1980s, Nigerian trade unions have been instrumental in protests against the removal of fuel subsidies, most notably in the large-scale "Occupy Nigeria" protest in 2012. According to the author, these protests are founded on the notion that the fuel subsidy is a component of Nigeria's social contract. By revisiting T. H. Marshall's groundbreaking work on citizenship and industrial citizenship, the author suggested that the protests serve as platforms for popular declarations of broader citizenship, as people support the fuel subsidy as a social right and affirm their civil rights to bargain and political rights to participate. With collective forms of representation, organization, and bargaining, this essay goes on to suggest that trade unions serve as a mediator between the state and its citizens. In this sense, despite diminished labor rights, Nigerian trade unions have maintained their significance for workers and beyond. However, this social contract is fragile, contextual and contradictory, and the mediating role of the unions carries challenges and ambiguities, which became particularly clear in the 2012 protest.

Natalini, D., Hossain, N., McCulloch, N., and Justino, P. (2022). According to "An exploration of the association between fuel subsidies and fuel riots," 41 countries saw at least one riot between 2005 and 2018 that was directly linked to the public's desire for fuel. We investigate the relationship between fuel prices and price regimes and fuel riots using a new international dataset on fuel riots. As anticipated, we discover that riots are mostly caused by significant domestic gasoline price shocks, which are frequently connected to global price shocks. We also present a new finding: domestic price regimes are closely linked to fuel riots. Large fuel subsidies are typically seen in nations that uphold fixed price regimes, particularly net energy exporters. When such subsidies become unsustainable, domestic price adjustments are large, often leading to riots.

In their article "Fuel subsidy reform and the social contract in Nigeria: A micro-economic analysis," McCulloch, N., Moerenhout, T., and Yang, J. (2021) Nigeria's massive fuel subsidies, which total over USD 3.9 billion, nearly quadruple the country's health budget. These subsidies come at a high cost: the majority of the subsidy goes to wealthier Nigerians, the distribution of resources to state governments is reduced, the opportunity costs of spending on other

development goals are high, and cheaper gasoline contributes to increased pollution, traffic, and climate change.

The majority of Nigerians, however, are against cutting assistance. We use data from a recent nationally representative household survey that inquired about the knowledge and attitudes of Nigerian women and men regarding subsidies. We develop and evaluate a series of hypotheses on the variables linked to support for reforming subsidies. We discover that people who pay more or have less access to fuel are more likely to be in favor of reform. However, those who think the government is dishonest or incapable of carrying out compensation plans seem to be quite against reform. Lastly, the acceptance of reform is also enhanced by religious affiliation and the provision of adequate local and national services. These findings provide credence to the notion that establishing a social contract is essential to the success of reform.

## METHODOLOGY

For this study, the survey research approach was used. According to Treadwell (2019), a survey is a comprehensive cross-sectional method in which a number of instances are examined at a specific point in time, and information is collected to examine the beliefs, values, behaviors, attitudes, habits, wishes, and behaviors of a particular community. Owuamalam (2012) asserts that a survey allows the researcher to address the traits of a selected group of individuals whose beliefs, actions, and attitudes are crucial for gathering the data needed for the study. As a result, the survey research approach is appropriate for this study since it involves people and their perspectives on a particular socio-political topic.

This study's geographic scope included the South Eastern Nigerian states of Anambra, Enugu, and Imo. The region, which is one of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, shares borders with the Atlantic Ocean to the south and Cameroon to the east (Ogbu, 2020; Ibenegbu, 2017). About 76,358 km<sup>2</sup> make up the southeast region of Nigeria, which is located south of the Benue Valley and east of the Lower Niger (Onunnajuru, 2016). The area lies between longitudes 7 and 9 degrees east and latitudes 4 and 7 degrees north of the equator (Okocha, 2020; Ogbu, 2020). The researcher is from the area and has lived there from birth, which is why it was chosen. Consequently, the researcher is familiar with the culture, religions, economics and sociological pattern of life of the people in the area.

The study's population of interest consisted of 18,763,730 people living in the three states that were chosen, with the following distribution as of December 31, 2023: 7,299,910 in Anambra, 6,067,722 in Enugu, and 5,396,098 in Imo (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2020). Using the Cochran's statistical formula, a sample size of 398 was established for the study, as illustrated below:

$$N = \frac{Z^2NPq}{Ne^2 + Z^2pq}$$

For this investigation, a multi-stage sampling method was employed. In the capital city of each of the three states, the researcher first found various clusters, such as students and government employees. After that, the researcher

selected Facebook users from each stratum using a systematic sample technique. The questionnaire served as the study's research tool. Section A and Section B comprised the two sections of the questionnaire. Section B contained the topic questions, whereas Section A had the respondents' biographical information.

With the help of some research support, the questionnaire was handed to the respondents. After giving a questionnaire to a respondent, the researcher worked with them to schedule a time for them to pick up the completed form. While those who might not be able to finish their comments right away are scheduled for a return trip, those who might be able to do so are welcomed. The necessity to guarantee efficient questionnaire distribution and retrieval served as the basis for this structure. Simple frequency tables were used to display the data produced by the quantitative analysis.

## RESULTS

This chapter used basic frequency distribution tables to show and analyze the quantitative data produced by this investigation. The simple frequency distribution tables were appropriate for the data presentation because the researcher's use of the survey research method resulted in data that adhered to nominal form. As previously mentioned, a questionnaire was used to collect data, and it was sent throughout three South Eastern states. Three hundred ninety-eight (398) copies of the questionnaire were sent to each state.

Table 1. Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieved

S/ N	States	No of Questionnaires Distributed	No of Questionnaire Retrieved	Percentage of Retrieved
1	Anambra	155(39%)	142	92%
2	State	129(32%)	123	95%
3	Enugu State Imo State	114 (29%)	103	90%
5	Total	398 (100%)	368	92.5%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024

The data in table 1, above revealed that out of the 398 copies of the questionnaires distributed, a total of 368 (92%) copies were completely filled and returned by the respondents. This was considered very high, and was attributed to the topical nature of the context and dedication of research assistants used in each of the states. Our subsequent data presentation and analyses were based on this data.

### *Demographic Data Presentation and Analyses*

The questionnaire had two sections (section A and Section B). Section A dealt with the biographic (demographic) data while section B dealt with the thematic data. The tables below explain the biographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents According to Sex

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Males	178	48%
Females	190	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data in table 2, above indicated an almost even distribution of the respondents who were males and females. A total of 190 respondents (52%) were females, while a total of 178 respondents (48%) were males. The implication of this data is that the outcome of the study would not have any sex bias.

Table 3. Age Distribution of Respondents

<b>Age Bracket</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18 – 30 years	44	12%
31 – 40 years	126	34%
41 – 50 years	88	24%
51 – 60 years	72	20%
61 – above years	38	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 3, above, the data indicated that 44 respondents (12%) were aged between 18 and 30 years, while a total of 126 respondents (34%) were aged, 31-40 years. Again, the data revealed that 88 respondents (24%) were between 41-50 years, while 72 respondents (20%) were between 51-60 years. A total of 38 respondents (10%) were between 61 years and above. The implication of the data on this table is that respondents aged 31-40 years had the highest frequency (34%), and followed by the respondents aged 41-50 years (24%). This represented the most active years in the population of a given people.

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Married

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	148	40%
Married	162	44%
Separated	28	8%
Divorced	12	3%
Widow/Widower	18	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024

In table 4, above, the data revealed that 148 respondents (40%) were single, while 162 respondents (44%) were married. Again, the data indicated that 28 respondents (8%) were separated; 12 respondents (3%) were divorced; and 18 respondents (5%) were widow/widower. The implication of the data on this table is that significant proportion of the respondents shoulder some

responsibilities and therefore bear the burden of some critical economic policies in Nigeria.

Table 5. Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualification

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
FSLC	0	0%
SSCE/WAEC	38	10%
ND/NCE	58	15%
HND/First Degree	178	48%
Masters Degree	76	21%
Ph.D	18	5%
Others specify	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024

Data in table 5, above indicated that 178 respondents (48%) hold HND/First Degree. This was followed by 76 respondents (21%) who hold Master's Degree. The data further revealed that 58 respondents (16%) possessed ND/NCE, while 38 respondents (10%) possessed WAEC/SSCE. Further still, 18 respondents (5%) possessed Ph.D. the implication of the data on this table is that the respondents were sufficiently educated to make informed contribution to matters of national public interest.

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents by Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Students	128	35%
civil Servants	142	39%
Traders	74	20%
Artisan	24	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2024

The data in table 6, above showed that 128 respondents (35%) were students, while 142 respondents (39%) were civil servants. Respondents who were traders were 74 (20%) while respondents who were artisan were 24 (7%). The implication of the data on the table above is that a significant proportion of the respondents were sufficiently educated to make use of facebook for information sharing/ dissemination and consumption.

#### *Thematic Data*

In this section, the data pertaining to the research objectives/questions are presented and analysed. These involved the data relating to the central theme of the study, through which generalizations were reached about the subject matter. We used the simple descriptive statistics (tables with frequencies and percentages) to present the data as revealed in succeeding sections.

Table 7. How do You Typically Stay Informed About Contemporary Issues in Nigeria?

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Radio/Television	72	20%
Newspapers	36	10%
Social media	147	40%
All of the above	110	30%
None of the above	0	0%
Others (specify)	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data in table 7, above indicated that 40% of the respondents got typically informed about contemporary issues in Nigeria through social media. A total of 72 respondents (20%) stay typically informed through radio and television while 36 respondents (10%) stayed typically informed through newspapers. Meanwhile, 110 respondents (30%) made use of radio/television, newspapers and social media to stay typically informed about contemporary issues in Nigeria. The implication of the data on table 4.2.1 above is that a significant proportion of the respondents made use of social media, which is a reflection of the contemporary digital communication society.

Table 8. Which Social Media Platform do You use More Often to Get Typically Informed?

Social Media Platform	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	202	55%
Instagram	18	5%
Twitter (X)	72	20%
Whatsapp	55	15%
Youtube	18	5%
Others (specify)	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 8, above, the data revealed that 202 respondents (55%) use facebook more often than others. This is followed by 72 respondents (20%) who opted for twitter and 55 respondents (15%) who marked whatsapp. The implication of the data on the table above is that facebook has become a veritable platform for effective communication, because the medium is the message.

Table 9. Facebook Is Used to Generate Feedback on Government Policies from the Citizen

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	73	20%
Agreed	148	40%
Undecided	80	22%
Strongly Disagreed	30	8%
Disagreed	37	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data on table 9, above revealed that 20% of the respondents (73) strongly agreed with the statement that facebook is used to generate feedback on government policies from citizens. While 148 respondents (40%) merely agreed with the statement, 80 respondents (22%) were undecided. Furthermore, 30 respondents (8%) strongly disagreed; and 37 respondents (10%) merely disagreed. The implication of the foregoing data is that facebook has become a veritable communication platform for deepening democratic participation of citizens.

Table 10. Acceptance or Otherwise of Any Government Policies, Programmes, and Activities can be Determined from Citizens' Reaction on Facebook

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	129	35%
Agreed	110	30%
Undecided	92	25%
Strongly Disagreed	0	0%
Disagreed	37	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 10, above, 129 respondents (35%) strongly affirmed that the acceptance, or otherwise of government policies, programmes and activities can be determined from citizens' reactions on facebook. Also, the data revealed that 110 respondents (30%) merely affirmed the statement, while 92 respondents (25%) were undecided. Furthermore, 37 respondents (10%) disagreed with the statement. The implication of the data on this table is that government can use facebook as a veritable communication platform to generate feedback from the citizens.



Table 11. The Level of Engagement and Active Discussion Generated on Facebook Regarding the Fuel Subsidy Imbroglio was High

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	92	25%
Agreed	128	35%
Undecided	37	10%
Strongly Disagreed	37	10%
Disagreed	74	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

In table 11, above, the data revealed that 92 respondents (25%) strongly affirmed with the statement that the level of engagement and active discussion generated on facebook regarding the fuel subsidy imbroglio was high. Again, 128 respondents (35%) strongly affirmed the statement, while 37 respondents (10%) were undecided. Furthermore, the data showed that 37 respondents (10%) and 74 respondents (20%) strongly disagreed and disagreed, respectively. The implication of the data on this table is that facebook is an interactive and engagement platform unlike mass media. It further implies deepen participatory democracy and inclusivity.

Table 12. The Prevailing Attitudes of Facebook Users Towards the Resolution Reached Concerning Fuel Subsidy Removal can be Ascertained from Active Discussion Generated from the Issue

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agreed	184	50%
Agreed	55	15%
Undecided	92	25%
Strongly Disagreed	0	0%
Disagreed	37	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data on table 12, above indicated that 50% of the respondents (184) strongly affirmed that the prevailing attitudes of facebook users towards the resolution reached concerning fuel subsidy removal can be ascertained from active discussion generated from the issue. Again, 55 respondents, representing 15% merely agreed with the statement, while 92 respondents (25%) were undecided. Furthermore, 37 respondents (10%) merely disagreed with the statement. This implies that facebook can influence attitudes of users on a given topical issue.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results showed that there was a significant degree of Facebook awareness about the FGN and organized labor's efforts to remove fuel subsidies in the Southeast. Once more, the results showed a strong correlation between the users' current attitudes and viewpoints and how they perceive the resolution reached on the removal of fuel subsidies. The majority of the empirical research that were reviewed for this study disagree with this finding. For example, the study by Ogbajafor, Anyim, and Ekweoba (2014), which examined the stances of the protagonists and opponents in the 2012 fuel subsidy removal protest, differs from our initial finding. This reviewed paper focused on the demonstration rather than how it was covered by any media outlets. Once more, the results of the study "between the Street and Aso Rock – the Role Nigerian Trade unions in popular protests" by Houeland (2018) are refuted by our initial discovery. The empirical article focuses on the 2012 demonstration against the withdrawal of fuel subsidies. Additionally, the study by Houeland (2022), which continued to concentrate on the 2012 fuel subsidy removal protest, did not support our first finding.

Our second finding showed a link between the impact of public pronouncements on the issue and Facebook users' attitudes toward the FGN and organized labor about the withdrawal of gasoline subsidies. This result is consistent with the agenda-setting hypothesis, which holds that the media must establish the necessary framework for public discourse on hot-button topics. Once more, our second conclusion is consistent with the Social Responsibility paradigm, which calls for the media to report on topics in a complete, impartial, balanced, and truthful manner. Our third conclusion also showed that Facebook users' perceptions of the resolution of the engagement are not significantly impacted by the public remarks and actions of various players.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study assessed how Facebook users perceived the resolution of the dispute over the elimination of gasoline subsidies between the Federal Government of Nigeria and NLC/TUC. The protest against the elimination of fuel subsidies and the ensuing interaction between the several parties involved in the subsidy removal served as the backdrop for the study. It seems that dialogue, understanding, and trust are essential to the creation and application of policies. In the case that the government's policy is attempted to be resisted, they are also crucial in resolving engagement.

Given that both parties signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), the NLC/TUC and the Federal Government's involvement over the fuel subsidy removal strategy has been delayed, which borders on a breach of trust and a weak social compact. Given the aforementioned, it is important to gauge the sentiment of the Nigerian media community regarding the settlement of the conflict between the Federal Government, TUC, and NLC. The study, titled "Facebook users' perception of the resolution of engagement between NLC, TUC, and the Federal Government of Nigeria over the fuel subsidy removal policy," was born out of this.

The study's findings showed a strong correlation between Facebook users' attitudes and opinions and their impression of the settlement achieved over the withdrawal of fuel subsidies. Our second conclusion showed a correlation between media surveillance and the amount of active conversation and participation created on Facebook around the elimination of fuel subsidies. Additionally, the findings showed that Facebook users' responses to the parties' resolve of engagement follow clear ideological trends.

According to the aforementioned findings, Facebook has become a true communication tool for increasing democratic involvement. In doing so, it helps to bridge the gap between the public and the government. This interface is required because the success of government programs and policies depends on the participation of citizens in their creation and execution. Therefore, the government uses Facebook perception to ascertain the general sentiment of the populace on government policy. According to the study's conclusions, the following is advised:

Facebook should be strongly supported and encouraged for its ability to generate enough feedback on government policy. This is due to the fact that television is more widely available and accessible than print media. Television is regarded as a medium for both literate and illiterate audiences since it also transcends language barriers. Additionally, it is advised that the government establish the conditions necessary to increase Facebook's accessibility for its residents.

#### **FURTHER STUDY**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

We acknowledge the three Nigerian newspapers used in the study; Daily Sun, Guardian, and the Vanguard. We equally appreciate the staff of Faculty of Social Sciences, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam staff for their cooperation and support.

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