

POVERTY AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF PRESIDENT BUHARI ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined poverty and democratic consolidation in Nigeria: a study of president Buhari administration. In carrying out the study, the researcher posited 3 research questions and 3 research objectives. Adequate efforts were made in reviewing extant literatures. This paper adopts the theory of Structural Functionalism to guide the study. In the methodological details, the study chooses quantitative research design with the use of descriptive survey. The population of the study was drawn from 100 respondents in Edo state who are political analysts, policy experts, academics and beneficiaries of National Social Investments Programmes (NSIP) who had firsthand experience and knowledge of poverty and democratic practices in Nigeria during the Buhari regime. In the data analysis, descriptive statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 27 and the data were presented using frequency distribution, Pie chart and percentages. Based on the results, the study reveals that although some of the strategies adopted by the Buhari administration, such as the Npower program and cash transfers, have indeed achieved positive impacts on democratic participation, their impact has been limited in their contribution to democratic consolidation. Based on the findings, the study recommends among others that government should enhance mechanisms that ensure transparency and accountability in the disbursement of funds for poverty reduction. Independent auditing should be made mandatory, accompanied by public reporting, to minimize corruption and ensure equity in resource allocation.

INTRODUCTION

The complex socio-economic and political dynamics have kept poverty relevant as a high threat to Nigeria's democratic consolidations. Since 1999, with the restoring of democratic administration, successive regimes tried simultaneously to tackle some challenges related to reduction of poverty and democratic development (Odigbo & Udalla, 2022). President Muhammad Buhari started his administration in the year 2015, with a promise of far-reaching reforms which aimed in alleviating poverty burden

from the masses on the through a comprehensive social intervention programs and economic restructurings Muhammed, (2021). The measures have however, fallen under critical scrutiny regarding effectiveness and their overall contribution toward democratic growth as poverty continues to persistently prevail.

The relation of poverty to democratic consolidation is complex, with economic privation undermining civic participation and weakening institutional frameworks, thus eroding public trust in democratic processes (Gillissen, et al, 2024). However, high levels of poverty

always results to voter disenfranchisement, or even the rise of authoritarian tendencies. While the interest of the Buhari administration in anti-corruption and economic policies is on the table, criticism has emerged regarding the efficiency of his strategies in poverty reduction and their impacts on democratic institutions.

The regime of President Buhari, introduced some poverty alleviation programs, including the National Social Investment Programmes comprising the N-Power Scheme and Conditional Cash Transfer (Ugwu & Okoli, 2021). While the intentions of the policies were good in lofty goals to give a lift to the lives of the commoners, for example, little of these plans had been effectively implemented as sustainable. From all intents and purposes, it would appear that there is some mismatch between policy formulation and actual delivery as evidenced by the high rate at which poverty seems to fly around. This may raise questions into the overall impact that these programs have on democratic consolidation.

Beyond this, democratic consolidation not only requires that elections be held regularly but also the entrenchment of democratic practices, such as accountability, transparency, and inclusivity (Paalo, et al, 2024). The persisting economic privation that the greater number of Nigerians had to endure during the Buhari administration galvanized public outrage, protests, and political apathy, which tended to further complicate the process of deepening democratic practices. The present study consequently intends to explore the relationship between poverty and democratic consolidation in Nigeria during the regime of President Buhari, in light of the fact that at least economic conditions make a difference in the best practice of democratic governance and levels of participation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the democratic strides made by Nigeria since its return to civilian rule in 1999, poverty remains one of the most significant challenges that pose a serious obstacle to the nation's political and economic stability (Prince, et al., 2023). While the purpose of democratic consolidation is targeted towards the smooth functioning of political institutions and protection of citizens' rights, yet persistent poverty attempts to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the democratic process (Dauda & Oyeleke, 2021). The poverty incidence in Nigeria has exceeded 40 percent of the nation's population (Prince, et al., 2023). This level of poverty has made the citizens to have some dissatisfaction with the government, weakened public trust and caused low levels of citizen engagement with democratic institutions. In this respect, persistent economic inequality presents a formidable threat to the consolidation of democracy and raises questions as to whether the Nigerian state has the capacity to make good on its promises for an economically inclusive growth and social justice.

Although President Muhammadu Buhari's administration came into office in 2015, promising among others, a fight against poverty yet little seemed to have been done with respect to some policy initiatives such as the Social Investment Programmes among other economic reforms. However, debates on such programs' ability to alleviate poverty have been highly contested. Critics further bemoan that government policies have not attempted in any meaningful way

to reduce the root causes of poverty at a time when it has gained increased acceptance among rural areas and marginal groups where poverty is most pervasive. It is also argued that the heavy reliance on short-term social welfare programs instead of long-term economic restructuring has raised many eyebrows, with a general perception in the majority that these are not enough to bring about real improvement in the lives of the average Nigerian (Prince, et al., 2023).

Besides, the inability to drastically reduce poverty has implications for democratic consolidation, as poverty breeds frustration, political disillusionment, and social unrest. These conditions create fertile ground for political instability that could undermine the country's democratic institutions and governance processes. This pervasive feeling of failure has contributed to declining confidence among the citizenry, as shown in the decreasing turnout in the recently conducted elections (Stanley, et al, 2024). As such, fostering a more stable and functional democracy becomes an uphill task. In this context, the present research tries to explain how poverty combines with democratic process in Nigeria during the regime of Buhari and also the effectiveness of Buhari's policies on poverty reduction in enhancing democratic consolidation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to examine the impact of poverty on democratic consolidation during the Buhari administration in Nigeria.

Specific Objectives:

1. To examine the nature of poverty reduction strategies implemented under Buhari's administration.
2. To identify the constraints that hindered the effectiveness of Buhari's poverty reduction policies.
3. To explore the challenges affecting democratic consolidation in Nigeria during Buhari's administration.

Research Questions:

1. What is the nature of Poverty Reduction Strategies utilized under Buhari's Administration
2. What are the constraints that hindered 'Buhari's poverty reduction policies?
3. What are the challenges facing Democratic Consolidation IN Nigeria Under Buhari's Administration

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Poverty

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, which incorporates economic, social, and psychic elements; it is usually measured by the inability to satisfy basic needs like food, shelter, health, and education. It is very often operationalized through various income measurements such as the international poverty line set by the World Bank, which defines poverty as living on less than \$1.90 per day (Jolliffe & Lakner, 2023). However, poverty is not just a case of

financial deprivation but includes lack of access to basic services, opportunity for economic advancement, and a minimum amount of decent life. Poverty refers to the situation wherein people or communities do not obtain full participation in social, economic, and political life because of lack of resources. The 1995 World Summit on Social Development, held in Copenhagen, expanded the definition of poverty and acknowledged its cross-cultural and universal nature by stating;

“Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environment and social discrimination and exclusion. It is characterized by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life... (see Mattes et al 2003:2)”

Besides its purely economic meaning, poverty takes deep social and psychic connotations. It is related to the social exclusion from opportunities which is capable of lifting people out of that status-availability such as quality education, health care, and social capital (Walker & Banteyba-Kyomuhendo, 2014). It socially engenders marginalization, excluding people and their groups from a voice or even less influence in public matters. It is important to understand that poverty can be manifested psychologically in feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, and social isolation, further entrenching intergenerational transmission (Sheehy-Skeffington & Rea, 2017). This contributes to the social exclusion of the poor, placing them in a situation from which it is rather difficult to come out and, as an end result, be further entrenched in the poverty condition.

Generally, the incidence of poverty in developing countries like Nigeria is usually symptomatic and emanates from historical, political, and structural causes (Ejumudo & Ejuvwekpokpo, 2013). Normally, high rates of poverty combine with political instability, poor governance, and unequal distribution of resources (Ejumudo & Ejuvwekpokpo, 2013). It is in such contexts that the fight against poverty would include not only immediate alleviation but also the roots of economic injustice. Long-term solutions to poverty require comprehensive strategies that address economic growth and social development, so that all citizens are afforded equal opportunity to advance their well-being and create a more secure future for themselves and their communities.

TYPES OF POVERTY

Absolute Poverty: Absolute poverty is the complete absence of what is considered necessary for survival. Individuals experiencing absolute poverty lack basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothes, or cannot access such. It is measured by international poverty lines, with the World Bank threshold being less than US\$1.90 a day Hussain, (2019). Absolute poverty occurs and is most frequent in the most underdeveloped areas, where people do not have access to essential services.

Relative Poverty: One experiences relative poverty in the light that they do not have what is termed as the resources needed to maintain the average level of living. It is more indicative of the economic

cleavage in society, which they are part of and which fosters social exclusion or reduces their access to opportunities (Rank & Hirschl, 2015). This kind of poverty is generally associated with a lower level of participation in cultural, educational, and recreational activities and is an increasing contributor to social cleavage.

Situational Poverty: Situational poverty, on the other hand, occurs through temporary misfortunes like loss of employment and natural disasters and health-related crises, which in most instances are curable with the appropriate interventions and support mechanisms available (Dixon, 2012). When unaddressed, situational poverty may become chronic, particularly if the economy of a country is fragile.

Generational Poverty: The kind of poverty that passes from generation to generation among the same family or communities is known as generational poverty Rahman, (2019). Most often, this kind of cycle is perpetuated by a lack of quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for the people to get out of the vicious circle. This sort of poverty will actually require long-term systemic changes if it is going to be disrupted from perpetuating itself.

Urban Poverty: The rate of urban poverty is found within cities and towns and affects the disadvantaged sections of populations because of their high density of living, inferior quality of housing standards, and restricted availability of basic civic amenities (Baker, 2008). Most often, it occurs with informal occupation and squalid living. Some of the characteristic features of urban poverty include low-cost housing, criminality, and the absence or poor availability of important public utilities such as health and hygiene facilities.

Rural Poverty: Rural poverty refers to conditions related to the populations of areas with poor infrastructural development, far from markets and access to basic services. It is also very closely related to agricultural underdevelopment that causes geographic isolation (Fafchamps, 2003). The inability to have proper access to schools and health centers is also one of the factors that contributes to keeping rural poverty in this vicious circle of deprivation.

THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Democratic consolidation is a process in which democracy becomes stable, resilient, and deeply engrained within the political culture of society. Linz and Stepan (1996) argue that consolidation requires institutional stability, rule of law, and broad-based acceptance of democratic norms among both citizens and political elites. The stability will ensure the survivability of democratic principles during political transitions and also against all external pressures.

Free, fair, and regular elections are considered one of the core elements of democratic consolidation. The elections must make real competition possible, through which the popular will concerning the winner is given free expression, uninfluenced by fraud, coercion, or manipulation (Mark, 2015). Thus, integrity of the electoral process cements public trust in democratic institutions and promotes accountability which in turn is considered indispensable for the survivability of democratic norms.

Another critical element is the assurance of civil liberty and political freedoms. Democratic consolidations cannot be said to occur without the entailment of rights connected with freedom of speech, assembling, and associations. These rights empower members to be increasingly active in the governance of the country and hold leaders answerable for malfeasances committed thereof.

Lastly, another imperative ingredient constitutes separation of the powers and further independence of judicial powers. Strong checks and well-balanced limitations prevent the propensity of power held by any powerful cluster hence enable relevant state institutions to work appropriately; a key influence to this is the development of accountability through 'checks and balances' (Kahan, 2015). The inculcation of civic education, public awareness, and active citizenship gives motivation toward sustainability of democratic norms and values. This will encourage participation through the civic organizations to support democratic practices at the grassroots level. Democratic consolidation also emanates from the socio-economic factors: a stable economy, reduction of poverty and more even development contribute to an increase in meaningful participation of the citizens in democracy. Addressing socio-economic disparities reduces social tensions that are likely to undermine democratic gains (Parvin, 2018).

POVERTY AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA

There is a strong linkage between poverty and democratic consolidation in Nigeria, with economic deprivation standing out as a serious threat to the democratic development of the country. A high incidence of poverty weakens democratic participation in which the capability of the citizens to engage in governance processes is diminished (Okey & Ikechukwu, 2024). Where the preoccupation becomes meeting the basic needs for survival, political involvement often takes a backseat. As has been observed during the presidency of Buhari, despite all his numerous social investments program aimed at reducing these figures, the rates of poverty remained relatively high, though not worse than his predecessors. Because poverty is still at an endemic level, the trend raises questions as to what pattern of intervention policies could eradicate poverty and ensures a democratic growth.

Poverty can also breed electoral malpractices, where economically poor individuals may easily give in to vote-buying and political manipulation (Muli, 2020). It casts doubt on the legitimacy of the election process and weakens confidence in democratic institutions. The state of economic deprivation forces these vulnerable groups into accepting financial inducements in lieu of votes.

Author	Title	Year	Methodology	Key Findings	Recommendations
Adeosun, A. B.	The Challenges of Consolidating Democracy in the Nigerian Fourth Republic: A Comment	2021	Historical and descriptive method, desk research using secondary data	Challenges of democratic consolidation include insecurity, poverty, banditry, leadership failure, corruption, and electoral malpractice.	Need for attitudinal change among rulers and citizens and adherence to democratic tenets.
Adamu, A.	Poverty and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward	2020	Historical/descriptive method, secondary data from books, journals, newspapers, and internet sources	Poverty hinders democratic utilization, consolidation; extreme poverty, hunger, and poor governance contribute to challenges.	Good governance, proper resource utilization, provision of social amenities, free and fair elections, transparency, and accountability.
Olufemi, A. B.	Democratic Governance and the Challenges of Leadership in Nigeria under Buhari Administration	2024	Descriptive documentary and methods, secondary data, elite theory	Leadership challenges under Buhari include corruption, adherence to the rule of law, and banditry.	Independent anti-corruption agencies, judicial independence, strategic use of non-security apparatus.
Gilbert, L. D., & Barigbon, C. B.	The Politics of Poverty in Democratic Participation: Nigeria in Perspective	2015	Political economy approach, class analysis	Poverty and political apathy are linked; ruling class power contests exclude the poor.	The poor should rise above ethnic and sectional sentiments, demand rights, and build a democracy based on social justice.

Besides, there is social inequality and marginalization caused by poverty, which might account for political instability. Where such poor groups are shut out from democratic dividends, they result in protests or civil disobedience. The rise of the youth movement like #Endbadgovernance testifies to the role which poverty and a feeling

of disinvestment play in fermenting civil disorder (Chigozie, 2024). Poverty as a barrier to democratic consolidation needs to be tackled on many fronts: through the implementation of effective poverty reduction strategies, strengthening of democratic institutions, and promotion of citizen engagement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper adopts the theory of Structural Functionalism, as initially expounded by Emile Durkheim 1893 and further extended by Talcott Parsons around the mid-20th century. In the framework, societal institutions in one way or another interlink and constitute part of larger systems with important implications for the existence and stability of the entire society. While Durkheim focused on the social cohesion aspect—that is, the bond of people together and the need to ensure that parts within a system operate harmoniously with one another, Parsons focused on the performances of various functions or services necessary for society's stability.

Structural functionalism, on the other hand, is a perspective that views each element in society as contributing to the overall functioning of the society and that the institutional framework, such as government, education, and economy, is very vital in maintaining proper balance in society. In the case of Nigeria, one can explain from this perspective that poverty and democratic consolidation are interlinked, wherein poverty affects the proper functioning of democratic institutions and democratic consolidation needs a stable socio-economic environment.

The framework is useful in the understanding of the level of poverty, as it connects mainly to democratic consolidation in Nigeria, especially during the regime of President Buhari. High levels of poverty disrupt the effective participation of citizens in democratic processes, weakening social cohesion and the legitimacy of governance structures. Functional institutions are at the heart of democratic stability, but these are often weakened by poverty, which reduces citizen engagement and accountability.

This paper, through the application of Structural Functionalism, intends to explain how poverty destabilizes the democratic structure of Nigeria and how systemic institutional reforms could facilitate poverty reduction and stronger democratic consolidation. The theory provides a framework for the interdependence of economic welfare and political stability and underlines the need for comprehensive reforms toward sustainable democratic development.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for the study is a descriptive survey. The descriptive approach is appropriate in conducting a study on the relationship between poverty and democratic consolidation in Nigeria during the regime of President Muhammadu Buhari. The design allows for the systematic collection and analysis of data to understand patterns and correlations between the variables under study. Population of the Study

The populations of the study are residents of Edo state who are political analysts, policy experts, academics and beneficiaries of National Social Investments Programmes (NSIP) who had firsthand

experience and knowledge of poverty and democratic practices in Nigeria during the Buhari regime; these are those who would have observed changes within this regime in sociopolitical and economic terms.

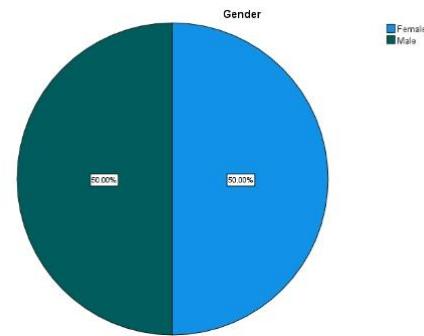
DATA PRESENTATION AND RESULTS

This section presents the analysis of data collected from respondents on demographic information and their perception of the poverty reduction programs in Nigeria. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize gender, age, occupation, and education. The key findings concern how effective the program is, the challenges facing the programs like corruption and poor targeting, and its impact on democratic consolidation. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha showed very strong internal consistency. Results are presented in frequency tables and percentages for clarity.

BIO-DATA OF RESPONDENT

Gender		
	N	%
Female	50	50.0%
Male	50	50.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

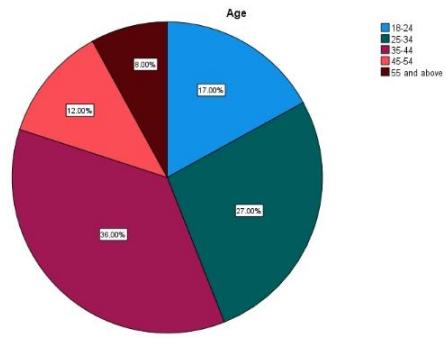


The gender distribution is perfectly balanced, with 50% of respondents identifying as female and 50% as male. This equal representation ensures a gender-neutral perspective in the dataset, minimizing bias from gender differences in the analysis.

Age

	N	%
18-24	17	17.0%
25-34	27	27.0%
35-44	36	36.0%
45-54	12	12.0%
55 and above	8	8.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

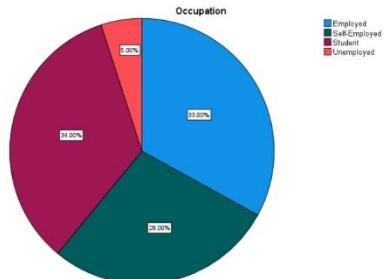


The largest age group among respondents falls between 35-44 years (36%), followed by 25-34 years (27%). Younger individuals aged 18-24 constitute 17%, while older groups (45-54 years and 55+) represent smaller portions (12% and 8%, respectively). This indicates a broad representation across age categories but with a concentration in the middle-aged demographic.

Occupation

	N	%
Employed	33	33.0%
Self-Employed	28	28.0%
Student	34	34.0%
Unemployed	5	5.0%

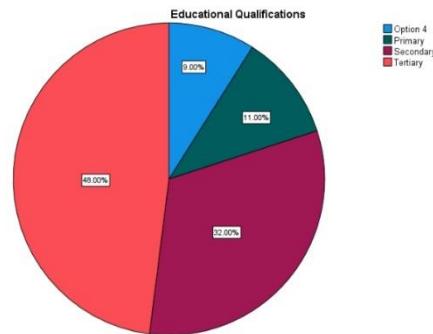
Source: Online Survey, 2024



The dataset reflects a diverse occupational background, with students making up the highest share (34%), followed by employed individuals (33%) and self-employed participants (28%). Only 5% reported being unemployed, suggesting most respondents are engaged in work or education activities.

Educational Qualifications

	N	%
Others	9	9.0%
Primary	11	11.0%
Secondary	32	32.0%
Tertiary	48	48.0%



The majority of respondents have tertiary education (48%), followed by secondary education (32%). Primary education and "Option 4" represent smaller portions, at 11% and 9% respectively. The high percentage of tertiary-educated respondents suggests a relatively well-educated sample population.

	N	%
Agree	47	47.0%
Disagree	14	14.0%
Strongly agree	14	14.0%
Strongly disagree	25	25.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A significant portion (47%) agrees that the Npower programme has improved citizens' trust in democratic institutions, while 25% strongly disagree. The responses reflect a divided perception, with a noticeable level of skepticism.

Cash transfers have led to increased political participation by citizens in the democratic process.

	N	%
Agree	51	51.0%
Disagree	16	16.0%
Strongly agree	17	17.0%
Strongly disagree	16	16.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A majority (51%) agree that cash transfers have boosted political participation, while 16% each disagree or strongly disagree. This suggests moderate support for the effectiveness of cash transfers in enhancing democratic involvement.

Trades and Market Monie programs have empowered citizens, thereby improving democratic consolidation

	N	%
Agree	55	55.0%
Disagree	19	19.0%
Strongly agree	16	16.0%
Strongly disagree	10	10.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A strong 55% agree that these programs have empowered citizens and improved democratic consolidation, while 19% disagree and 16% strongly agree. This indicates generally positive feedback on the impact of these initiatives.

The COVID-19 loan scheme and the N50 Billion Targeted Credit Facility have helped improve governance and democracy.

	N	%
Agree	52	52.0%
Disagree	14	14.0%
Strongly agree	25	25.0%
Strongly disagree	9	9.0%

The COVID-19 loan scheme and N50 Billion Targeted Credit Facility received positive feedback, with 52% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing they improved governance and democracy. Only 9% strongly disagree, showing overall positive sentiment.

The poverty reduction policies under Buhari (e.g., Npower, cash transfers) have had a minimal effect on democratic consolidation.

	N	%
Agree	46	46.0%
Disagree	20	20.0%
Strongly agree	17	17.0%
Strongly disagree	17	17.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

Perceptions on the minimal effect of Buhari's poverty reduction policies are mixed, with 46% agreeing and 17% strongly agreeing, while 20% disagree. This indicates a general belief that these policies had limited impact on democratic consolidation.

Buhari's poverty reduction initiatives have encouraged more citizens to participate in democratic processes, such as voting.

	N	%
Agree	55	55.0%
Disagree	22	22.0%
Strongly agree	14	14.0%
Strongly disagree	9	9.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A majority (55%) agree that Buhari's poverty reduction initiatives encouraged democratic participation, while 22% disagree. This suggests moderate approval of the policies' influence on civic engagement.

Analysis of Research Question 2: What are the constraints that hindered 'Buhari's poverty reduction policies'?

Inadequate funding has hindered the success of Buhari's poverty reduction policies

	N	%
Agree	48	48.0%
Disagree	16	16.0%
Strongly agree	21	21.0%
Strongly disagree	15	15.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

48% of respondents agree that inadequate funding has hindered the success of Buhari's policies, while 21% strongly agree. This indicates a widespread belief in financial constraints affecting policy outcomes.

Corruption within the implementation of poverty reduction programs has limited their effectiveness

	N	%
Agree	41	41.0%
Disagree	16	16.0%
Strongly agree	35	35.0%
Strongly disagree	8	8.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A substantial 41% agree and 35% strongly agree that corruption within poverty reduction programs has limited their effectiveness. Only 8% strongly disagree, indicating a prevailing negative perception regarding corruption issues.

Lack of proper targeting of beneficiaries has reduced the impact of poverty reduction initiatives.

	N	%
Agree	54	54.0%
Disagree	17	17.0%
Strongly agree	12	12.0%
Strongly disagree	17	17.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

Most respondents (54%) agree that poor targeting reduced the impact of poverty initiatives, while 17% both disagree and strongly disagree, indicating moderate agreement with targeting concerns.

Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas has prevented effective delivery of poverty reduction programs

	N	%
Agree	45	45.0%
Disagree	23	23.0%
Strongly agree	22	22.0%
Strongly disagree	10	10.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas is seen as a barrier, with 45% agreeing and 22% strongly agreeing, while 23% disagree. This highlights significant infrastructure concerns in program delivery.

Mismanagement and lack of transparency in the distribution of poverty alleviation funds have caused program failures

	N	%
Agree	43	43.0%
Disagree	20	20.0%
Strongly agree	24	24.0%
Strongly disagree	13	13.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

43% agree and 24% strongly agree that mismanagement and lack of transparency have caused program failures, while 13% strongly disagree, reflecting substantial concern about governance issues.

Analysis of Research Question: What are the challenges facing Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria Under Buhari's Administration

Political instability, including election rigging, has hindered democratic consolidation in Nigeria under Buhari

	N	%
Agree	47	47.0%
Disagree	18	18.0%
Strongly agree	23	23.0%
Strongly disagree	12	12.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A majority (47%) agrees and 23% strongly agree that political instability, including election rigging, has hindered democratic consolidation, while only 12% strongly disagree. This reflects a significant concern about political challenges.

Corruption within government institutions has significantly undermined efforts at democratic consolidation.

	N	%
Agree	34	34.0%
Disagree	35	35.0%
Strongly Agree	10	10.0%
strongly disagree	21	21.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

Opinions are more divided regarding corruption in government institutions, with 34% agreeing and 35% disagreeing, while 21% strongly disagree. This indicates a nearly even split in perceptions of institutional corruption.

Economic hardship caused by poor policies has led to public dissatisfaction, affecting democratic processes

	N	%
Agree	49	49.0%
Disagree	26	26.0%
Strongly Agree	15	15.0%
strongly disagree	10	10.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

49% agree and 15% strongly agree that economic hardship from poor policies has led to public dissatisfaction, while 26% disagree. This shows moderate agreement on the impact of economic struggles on democratic participation.

Lack of trust in the electoral process has weakened democratic consolidation in Nigeria under Buhari's leadership.

	N	%
Agree	44	44.0%
Disagree	24	24.0%
Strongly Agree	23	23.0%
strongly disagree	9	9.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

A significant portion (44%) agrees and 23% strongly agrees that lack of trust in the electoral process has weakened democratic consolidation, while 9% strongly disagree. Trust issues appear to be a widespread concern.

Ethnic and religious divisions have prevented national unity, thereby hindering democratic progress.

	N	%
Agree	45	45.0%
Disagree	27	27.0%
Strongly Agree	18	18.0%
strongly disagree	10	10.0%

Source: Online Survey, 2024

Ethnic and religious divisions are seen as a barrier to national unity by 45% of respondents, with 18% strongly agreeing, while 27% disagree. This highlights concerns over unity challenges.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal a mixed perception of poverty reduction strategies under Buhari's administration, with some policies perceived positively while others face criticism. For instance, the Npower program received moderate support, with 47% agreeing that it enhanced trust in democratic institutions, while a significant 25% strongly disagreed. Similarly, cash transfers were seen as encouraging political participation, with 51% agreement, indicating moderate success in promoting civic engagement. However, the belief that poverty reduction policies had minimal effect on democratic consolidation remained prevalent, as 46% agreed with this statement. These findings suggest that while certain initiatives positively influenced political engagement, their broader impact on democratic consolidation was limited.

Among the constraints that had faced the success of Buhari's poverty reduction policies were funding limitations, corruption, and poor targeting. 48% of the respondents reported inadequate funding to be a key constraint facing the implementation of these policies, where 21% strongly agreed. Corruption in implementing programs is also an issue, where a total of 76% either agreed or strongly agreed that this was limiting effectiveness. Besides this, there is also a case of poor beneficiary targeting, as 54% agreed that this would reduce the impact of the policy in question. Such barriers suggest that there is some sort of systemic problem hampering efforts toward poverty reduction, as the literature indicates that for policies to succeed, there must be transparency and accountability (Carter, 2014).

Equally, challenges to democratic consolidation under Buhari's regime are evident from aspects like political instability, economic hardship, and corruption at an institutional level. The political instability, including rigging of elections, was one of the major issues that have been witnessed to affect democratic development, with 47% agreeing and 23% strongly agreeing that it breeds obstacles in democratic progress. Equally, poor policies leading to economic hardship have compounded dissatisfaction with 49% agreeing that such factor has impacted the democratic process.

Corruption within government institutions also presented a challenge, with 34% agreeing and 35% disagreeing on its impact, reflecting divided opinions on institutional integrity under Buhari. These findings underscore the complex relationship between governance challenges and democratic development, as previously noted by Odo, (2015).

CONCLUSION

The findings reveal that although some of the strategies adopted by the Buhari administration, such as the Npower program and cash transfers, have indeed achieved positive impacts on democratic participation, their impact has been limited in their contribution to

democratic consolidation. These programs, while recording fairly impressive performances in promoting civic engagement, have been hindered by challenges related to corruption, underfunding, inappropriate targeting, and systemic governance issues. The democratic advancement was also deterred by the political instability, economic hardships, and institutional mistrust, for which comprehensive reform needed to tackle the structural stumbling blocks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improved transparency and accountability: The government should enhance mechanisms that ensure transparency and accountability in the disbursement of funds for poverty reduction. Independent auditing should be made mandatory, accompanied by public reporting, to minimize corruption and ensure equity in resource allocation.

Targeted Beneficiary Identification: Implementing a more robust data-driven system for identifying beneficiaries can address the issue of poor targeting. This can be achieved through digital registries and collaboration with local authorities to ensure those most in need receive support.

Increased Funding and Resource Allocation: Sufficient financial allocation should always be made so that poverty prevalence programs are pursued. Increasing any budget, according to the need apparent in the programs like Npower and resultant cash transfers given to people where the reach into the population also increases, will enhance the result of the exercise. Regular evaluation systems will ensure their proper utilization.

Capacity Building and Civic Education: It could also be argued that civic education, when combined with poverty alleviation, may lead to stronger democratic consolidation by giving citizens the capacity for active participation in governance processes. Besides, training programs on rights, voting, and public engagement could instill a greater democratic consciousness.

Structural Political Challenges: Reforms in electoral processes and reduction of political instability are required, such as more effective election monitoring and anti-rigging measures. Democratic consolidation can be further facilitated by strengthening democratic institutions and making governance inclusive.

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