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**INSTINCTIVE FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL AND THE DEBACLE OF HUMAN SECURITY IN
NIGERIA: AN EXPOSITION OF THE RIVERS STATE EXPERIENCE**

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ABSTRACT

The likelihood that the catastrophe and machinations surrounding Nigeria's fuel subsidy removal could alarmingly affect human security was an issue. This prompted the scrutiny of the instinctive fuel subsidy removal and the debacle of human security in Nigeria: An exposition of the Rivers State experience. The study formulated three research questions and their corresponding objectives, which were to ascertain how the politisation of fuel subsidy removal impedes the attainment of social security, evaluate how the politisation of fuel subsidy removal affects economic security, and examine how the politicization of fuel subsidy removal impedes physical security in Rivers State. The study adopted Karl Marx's political economy approach on dialectical materialism as the theoretical framework. An 18-item self-structured instrument was used to collect data from 406 selected public servants in Rivers State. Collected data was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The study revealed that the politicization of fuel subsidy removal has far-reaching implications for social security ($\bar{X}=3.72$), economic security ($\bar{X}=3.74$), and physical security ($\bar{X}=3.76$) in Rivers State. The study recommended, among others, that the government should strengthen the implementation of social welfare programmes such as transportation subsidies, food assistance programmes, and direct cash transfers to support and cushion the financial burden on struggling households and vulnerable populations. Alongside, the government should strategically adopt and implement a "Conflict-Sensitive and De-Escalation and Law Enforcement (CSDLE) policy by training security personnel on human rights-based policing that will help foster trust and minimize the risks of human rights violations, injuries, and fatalities even during protests.

Keywords: Instinctive, Fuel Subsidy Removal, Debacle, Human Security, Rivers State.

Introduction

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has been a subject of intense debate, primarily due to its reflective implications on the public. Wosu et. al. (2024) noted that fuel subsidy is a part of government action that eases the cost of gasoline by giving direct economic assistance to oil companies, thus subsidizing the product for consumers. Fuel subsidies have been in existence since the 1970s. It activated with the government frequently providing fuel at below-cost rates to Nigerians to mitigate the impact of rising global oil prices on Nigerians (Wosu et. al., 2024, p. 8). Following the passage of the Price Control Act in 1977, fuel subsidies became institutionalized, making it unlawful to sell certain items (including gasoline) over the regulated price. This rule was enacted by the military administration of Olusegun Obasanjo in an attempt to mitigate the impacts of the global big inflation era of the 1970s, which was driven by a worldwide increase in energy costs.

Rising fuel costs as a result of sudden subsidy removal have a cascading effect on food prices due to increased transportation expenses. A recent study involving international development partners, including the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, revealed that over 31 million Nigerians are experiencing acute food shortages, exacerbated by heightened insecurity and the removal of fuel subsidies. The effectiveness of subsidy removal largely depends on the government's ability to manage and redirect the saved resources transparently. Akanle et al. (2014) argue that without clear communication and visible benefits from subsidy reforms, public skepticism persists, undermining the legitimacy of such policies.

Problem Identification

The issue of fuel subsidy removal has become a major concern to all and sundry in Nigeria. The immediate consequence of subsidy removal is a sharp increase in fuel prices, leading to higher transportation and production costs. This escalation contributes to inflation, affecting the affordability of essential goods and services. Gana et al. (2023) disclosed that the economic pressures arising from the sudden removal of fuel subsidies can exacerbate poverty levels and widen socioeconomic inequalities. The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has remained a contentious policy decision, often triggering economic and social crises that directly impact human security. Historically, the Nigerian government has justified subsidy removal as a necessary step to free up resources for infrastructure and social programmes (Eze, 2021). However, the abrupt and instinctive nature of these subsidy removals has recurrently led to widespread hardship, escalating inflation, and social unrest (Okonkwo & Adegbite, 2022). This policy approach, rather than fostering economic stability, aggravates existing susceptibilities within the population.

Human security, as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994), encompasses economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. The removal of fuel subsidies without adequate social protection measures threatens multiple dimensions of human security in Nigeria. First, economic security is threatened as fuel price hikes lead to increased costs of transportation, goods, and services, unreasonably affecting low-income earners (Adeniyi & Bello, 2020). Secondly, food security is conceded as rising fuel costs inflate agricultural production expenses, leading to higher food prices and reduced access to nutritious food for vulnerable populations (Olawale, 2019). Additionally, the instinctive nature of subsidy removals often implemented without comprehensive economic cushions has fueled public

protests and civil unrest, worsening personal and community security (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2021). For instance, the 2012 Occupy Nigeria protests and the 2023 demonstrations following President Tinubu's announcement of subsidy removal during his first inauguration on May 29, 2023, illustrate the precariousness associated with such sudden policies. These protests underscore the failure of the government to implement palliative measures that cushion the socioeconomic impact on the populace (Nwachukwu, 2023).

Scholars have argued that a gradual, well-structured removal plan, coupled with effective social investment programmes, is crucial for minimizing the adverse effects on human security (Ogundipe & Adesina, 2022). Alternative policies, such as reinvesting subsidy savings into mass transportation, education, and healthcare, could mitigate economic shocks and foster inclusive development (Ojo & Bamidele, 2020). Without such measures, subsidy removal remains a catalyst for deepening poverty and insecurity in Nigeria. Although fuel subsidy removal is often positioned as an economic necessity, its instinctive implementation exacerbates human security challenges. It is against this background that the paper examines instinctive fuel subsidy removal and the debacle of human security in Nigeria: An exposition of the Rivers State.

Research Questions

The paper is guided by the following research questions:

- i. How does politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impede social security in Rivers State?
- ii. What are the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the economic security in Rivers State?
- iii. What are the impacts of the politicization of fuel subsidy removal on physical security in Rivers State?

The general objective of this paper was to examine the instinctive fuel subsidy removal and the debacle of human security in Rivers State. The specific objectives were to:

- i. Ascertain how the politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impedes the attainment of social security;
- ii. Evaluate how the politicisation of fuel subsidy removal affects economic security; and
- iii. Determine how the politicization of fuel subsidy removal impedes physical security in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Subsidy

A subsidy is a benefit given to an individual, business, or institution, usually by the government. It can be direct (such as cash payments) or indirect (such as tax breaks). Alozie (2009) submits that subsidy encompasses monetary assistance provided by governments to support critical activities and keep prices of goods or services below market level. It is a financial intervention by the government to support businesses, individuals, or industries to promote economic stability, social welfare, and development (World Bank, 2020). In many economies, subsidies are a crucial tool for social protection. In this light, fuel subsidies are widely implemented in developing countries to stabilize energy prices and support economic activities (Adeniyi & Bello, 2020). Yet, while subsidies can offer short-term relief, they often present long-term economic challenges. Poorly structured subsidies can lead to fiscal deficits, economic distortions, and inefficiencies, particularly when they are not properly targeted (Clements et al., 2013).

Additionally, subsidies can encourage overconsumption, discourage investment in alternative solutions, and create dependency on government support (Bauer et al., 2017). A key

debate surrounding subsidies is their sustainability and effectiveness. While Scholars argue that subsidies alleviate poverty, promote industrial growth, and enhance social equity, critics contend that they can lead to corruption, waste, and misallocation of resources (Moyo & Mlachila, 2020). The challenge for policymakers is to design subsidies that are both economically viable and socially beneficial, ensuring that they reach the intended beneficiaries without creating excessive financial burdens on governments (Rentschler & Bazilian, 2017).

Fuel Subsidy

Governments stereotypically justify fuel subsidies as a means of ensuring energy affordability, reducing inflationary pressure, and supporting key economic sectors such as transportation, agriculture, and manufacturing (Anderson & Martin, 2021). Moyo and Mlachila (2020) averred that fuel subsidy is often criticized for having a financial burden on government budgets. Reports have proven that many oil-dependent nations, including Nigeria, Venezuela, and Indonesia, have struggled with the high cost of maintaining fuel subsidies, leading to budget deficits and reduced investment in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Moyo & Mlachila, 2020).

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), fuel subsidies disproportionately benefit wealthier households, as they tend to consume more fuel compared to lower-income groups, thereby exacerbating income inequality (Clements et al., 2013). Highlighting further, Brauer et. al. (2017) stated that fuel subsidies can contribute to economic inefficiencies by discouraging investment in renewable energy-efficient technologies (Bauer et al., 2017). However, fuel subsidies are often introduced to promote economic stability and social welfare, but they come with significant political, economic, and social unrest.

Fuel Subsidy Removal Policy in Nigeria

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has been one of the most debated economic policies, with significant socio-economic and political implications. Despite the economic justifications, government policy on the removal of fuel subsidies has often triggered significant inflationary pressures. The increase in fuel prices emanating from subsidy removal leads to higher transportation costs, which in turn affects the cost of goods and services, pushing more people into poverty (Olawale, 2019). The 2012 attempt at subsidy removal under President Goodluck Jonathan was met with widespread protests, known as the Occupy Nigeria movement, which forced the government to partially reinstate the subsidy (Ogundipe & Adesina, 2022).

The recent Nigerian government policy on sudden fuel subsidy removal was met with mixed reactions. While some acknowledged the long-term economic benefits, many Nigerians expressed concerns over the immediate rise in living costs and the potential increase in poverty levels. The significant number of individuals experiencing acute food shortages underscored the urgency for effective social safety nets and targeted interventions to protect vulnerable populations. In 2023, Nigeria implemented a significant economic reform by removing longstanding fuel subsidies, a move that has had profound implications for the nation's economy and populace (Nwachukwu, 2023). This policy shift aimed to reduce government expenditure, address fiscal deficits, and reallocate resources to critical sectors such as infrastructure, education, and healthcare. Nwachukwu (2023) avers that this recent policy reform led to immediate economic

shocks, including skyrocketing fuel prices and inflationary pressures, prompting urgent calls for social intervention programmes.

The Impediments of Subsidy Removal on Social Security in Rivers State

The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has presented significant challenges to social security, exacerbating economic hardships and reducing access to essential services. International Labour Organisation (2022) broadly defined social security as measures put in place to protect citizens from economic shocks and vulnerabilities, is crucial for maintaining social stability (International However, the abrupt removal of fuel subsidies in 2023 has placed a considerable strain on households, businesses, and the overall welfare of the Nigerian populace (Olawale, 2019). One of the primary ways subsidy removal has impeded social security is by escalating living, transportation, housing, medical, commodities, and even education costs.

Ogundipe and Adesina (2022) opined that the sudden rise in fuel prices has increased transportation costs, which in turn have driven up the prices of essential commodities such as food, healthcare, and education. This inflationary pressure has reduced the purchasing power of Nigerians, particularly low- and middle-income earners, leading to increased poverty and economic insecurity (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2021). Additionally, job losses have surged as businesses, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), struggle to cope with rising operational costs (Okonkwo & Adegbite, 2022). The informal sector, which employs a significant proportion of Nigerians, has been particularly hard hit, further exacerbating economic instability. As unemployment rates increase, fewer people have access to contributory pension schemes and other forms of social security, leaving them vulnerable to economic shocks (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023).

The removal of subsidies has also impeded access to social security by making essential public services less affordable and accessible. Rising transportation costs have made it more difficult for individuals to reach healthcare facilities, resulting in a decline in healthcare utilization, particularly in rural areas (Nwachukwu, 2023). Similarly, educational opportunities have been affected as families struggle to afford school fees and transportation for their children (Ojo & Bamidele, 2020). Moreover, many Nigerians rely on fuel-powered generators due to the country's erratic electricity supply. The increased cost of fuel has made it more expensive to generate electricity, affecting businesses and households alike (Harvey, 2011). This situation has further deepened social inequalities, as wealthier individuals can afford alternative power sources while poorer communities face worsening living conditions.

The Impediment of Subsidy Removal on Economic Security in Nigeria

Economic security, which entails stable income, access to essential goods and services, and protection from economic shocks, is a critical component of national stability and development (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). The removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has significantly undermined economic security by escalating living costs, reducing employment opportunities, and widening income inequality (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). While subsidy removal is often justified as a necessary economic reform, its abrupt implementation has exposed millions of Nigerians to financial instability and economic hardship (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2021). One of the most immediate effects of subsidy removal is the dramatic increase in fuel prices, which has had a cascading effect on the prices of transportation, food, and other essential commodities (Okonkwo & Adegbite, 2022). Inflation has eroded the purchasing

power of many Nigerians, particularly low- and middle-income earners, making it more difficult to afford necessities. According to the World Bank (2023), Nigeria's inflation rate spiked following the removal of fuel subsidies, exacerbating food insecurity and reducing household savings.

Moreover, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's economy, have struggled to cope with increased operational costs (Olawale, 2019). Many businesses rely on fuel for production and transportation, and the rising cost has led to downsizing, salary reductions, and in some cases, business closures (Harvey, 2011). The decline in SME productivity has further weakened the economy and contributed to rising unemployment rates (Nwachukwu, 2023). Fuel subsidy removal has also negatively impacted employment, further jeopardizing economic security. Many sectors, including transportation, agriculture, and manufacturing, depend heavily on fuel. The sharp rise in fuel costs has forced companies to cut jobs, thereby increasing unemployment and reducing disposable incomes (Ojo & Bamidele, 2020). This aligns with the findings of Chang (2010), who argued that economic liberalisation policies without proper social safety nets often result in job losses and financial instability.

The informal sector, which employs a majority of Nigeria's working population, has been particularly vulnerable. Street vendors, transport operators, and artisans have seen their operational costs skyrocket, leading to a decline in their earnings and financial security (Foster, 2020). Without alternative employment opportunities, many individuals have been pushed further into poverty, increasing their dependence on social welfare systems that are already overstretched (ILO, 2022).

The removal of subsidies has further widened the gap between the rich and the poor, deepening economic disparities. While wealthier individuals can absorb the rising costs by leveraging savings or alternative energy sources, low-income earners have been disproportionately affected. Ake (1981) discloses that the economic divide has fueled social discontent, with increased protests and labor strikes signaling widespread frustration. According to the UNDP (2023), economic security is essential for national stability, and policies that undermine financial stability can contribute to increased crime rates, political instability, and social unrest. The recent wave of fuel-related protests in Nigeria reflects the growing economic distress faced by citizens, with many demanding government intervention to mitigate the adverse effects of subsidy removal (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2021).

The Impact of Instinctive Subsidy Removal on Physical Security in Nigeria

The sudden removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria has significantly impacted physical security, leading to increased crime rates, social unrest, and a decline in law enforcement capacity. Physical security, which encompasses the protection of individuals from violence, threats, and harm, is a fundamental component of national stability and economic development (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). However, the instinctive or sudden removal of subsidies without adequate mitigation measures has exacerbated socioeconomic tensions, increasing the vulnerability of citizens to security threats (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023). One of the most immediate consequences of instinctive subsidy removal on physical security is the rise in crime rates, particularly in urban centers. Ibrahim and Yusuf (2021) postulate that the economic hardship that follows the removal of subsidies often pushes individuals into criminal activities as a means of survival.

Studies have shown that economic deprivation is strongly linked to an increase in theft, robbery, and organized crime (Ogundipe & Adesina, 2022). With rising fuel costs leading to inflation and job losses, many Nigerians, particularly young people, have been forced into illicit activities to sustain their livelihoods (Okonkwo & Adegbite, 2022). According to Nwachukwu (2023), fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria has historically led to spikes in social unrest, with protests escalating into violent confrontations between civilians and security forces. The lack of government preparedness in cushioning the economic effects of subsidy removal has created an environment where discontent translates into widespread disorder, further straining national security (Ojo & Bamidele, 2020).

The removal of subsidies has repeatedly triggered mass protests, demonstrations, and labour strikes in Nigeria. The 2023 subsidy removal policy, for instance, sparked widespread resistance, with citizens demanding government intervention to alleviate economic hardship (UNDP, 2023). Such protests often escalate into violent clashes between demonstrators and law enforcement agencies, leading to casualties and destruction of public infrastructure (Foster, 2020). Harvey (2011) argues that sudden economic policy shifts, particularly those that affect the cost of living, can lead to political instability and increase the likelihood of state repression. In Nigeria, law enforcement agencies have struggled to manage the scale of public demonstrations, often resorting to excessive force, which further fuels resentment against the government (Chang, 2010). As tensions rise, security agencies face difficulties in maintaining order, weakening the overall security framework of the nation (World Bank, 2023).

The economic strain caused by subsidy removal has also impacted the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. Rising fuel prices have made it more expensive to operate security vehicles, reducing the capacity of police and military personnel to respond to crime and emergencies (Okonkwo & Adegbite, 2022). In rural areas, where law enforcement presence is already limited, the increased cost of fuel has further restricted mobility, allowing criminal elements such as bandits and insurgents to operate with greater freedom (Ibrahim & Yusuf, 2021). The weakening of security agencies has further emboldened armed groups, including Boko Haram insurgents, militants, bandits, and unknown gunmen who exploit economic grievances to recruit vulnerable individuals into their ranks (Olawale, 2019). The worsening security situation has led to increased incidents of kidnapping, rural banditry, and communal violence, particularly in regions that were already experiencing instability before the subsidy removal (Nwachukwu, 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Karl Marx's political economy approach as the theoretical framework of analysis. Karl Marx extensively reviewed the Hegelian philosophy of right, which appeared in 1844, and found that material (economic) life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in the society (Harvey, 2011). According to Ntete-Nna (2004, p. 235), political economy is a discipline that focuses attention on not only the production and management of the society and its material wealth but also its distribution among the various segments or classes and conflict that arises from these processes. Marx argued that economic structures determine social relations and that capitalism inherently leads to class antagonisms, where the ruling class prioritizes profit maximization over the well-being of the working class.

Karl Marx's political economy approach, grounded in historical materialism and class struggle, provides a critical lens through which to analyze the instinctive removal of fuel subsidies in Rivers State in particular and Nigeria in general and its consequences for human security. This

framework is particularly relevant in understanding how the abrupt removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria in 2023 has exacerbated economic inequalities and threatened human security. This theory is premised on how societies change from one mode of production to another, and this also plays out in the relationship between the superstructure and the substructure. Epelle and Uranta (2014, p. 530) opined that Marx's idea on the mode of production of material needs is the main determinant of other aspects of human life. Marxian Political-Economy approach gives primacy to material conditions, principally economic factors.

This theory argues that human existence is largely determined by man's meeting his survival on economic activities viewed in terms of our relationship to production, distribution, and exchange, which in themselves have decisive formative influences on the nature and character of the state. The theory of political economy explains that the present is determined by the past through conflict and cooperation. Little wonder that Ake (1981, p. 51) recognized the material disposition of a main as what determines the political system. In his view, once you understand the material assets of the society, how it produces and distributes goods, and the type of social relations of production, you have understood everything about that society.

Fuel Subsidy Removal as a Manifestation of Capitalist Class Interests

Marx's critique of capitalism suggests that economic policies, including fuel subsidy removal, often serve the interests of the bourgeoisie (the ruling elite) at the expense of the proletariat (the working class) (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002). In Nigeria, the decision to eliminate fuel subsidies was framed as an economic necessity aimed at reducing fiscal deficits and reallocating government spending (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). Olawale (2019) submits that the policy disproportionately affected the poor and working-class citizens, who rely on affordable fuel for transportation, electricity generation, and small-scale businesses.

The resulting price hikes led to increased costs of goods and services, further entrenching economic hardship among vulnerable populations. The removal of subsidies aligns with the interests of multinational oil corporations and local elites, who benefit from deregulated fuel markets, while the working class bears the brunt of the economic shock (Okonkwo & Adegbite, 2022). The instinctive and abrupt nature of the removal suggests a lack of democratic engagement with the masses, reinforcing Marx's argument that the state functions as an instrument of the ruling class rather than a true representative of the people (Poulantzas, 1978).

Human Security and the Crisis of Social Reproduction

Human security, which encompasses economic, food, health, and environmental security (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 1994), has been significantly undermined by the removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria. Marx's concept of social reproduction—the processes by which the working class sustains itself - highlights how capitalist policies disrupt essential aspects of life, including access to affordable necessities (Federici, 2004). The rising costs of transportation and basic commodities have worsened poverty levels, making it difficult for low-income households to maintain their livelihoods (Ogundipe & Adesina, 2022). Implicitly, the increased cost of living has triggered social unrest, with mass protests and labor strikes reflecting growing discontent among the working class (Nwachukwu, 2023).

Furthermore, Marxist theorists argue that such crises are inherent in capitalist economies, where economic policies are designed to benefit the elite while creating hardship for the majority (Foster, 2020). The Nigerian government's response of offering short-term palliatives rather than structural solutions demonstrates how state institutions function to maintain the existing class structure rather than address systemic inequality (Ojo & Bamidele, 2020). Marx's political economy approach provides a valuable framework for understanding the instinctive removal of fuel subsidies in Nigeria and its impact on human security. By highlighting the class dimensions of this policy, Marxist analysis reveals how economic decisions often serve elite interests while exacerbating poverty and social instability.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a survey design to elicit information from the respondents concerning the instinctive fuel subsidy removal and the debacle of human security in Nigeria: An exposition of the Rivers State experience.

Population of the Study

A population is an entire group of people in a category (Sekeran, 2003). The population of this study is, therefore drawn from the 40,000 public servants in Rivers State (Rivers State Civil Service Commission, 2024). Thus, the total population of this study is 40,000.

Sample Size and Sample Technique

The sample size of the study is 430 respondents, which was determined from the total population using the Yamane Taro (1967) formula as follows

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n is the sample size

N is population

e is the desired margin of error.

$$n = \frac{40,000}{1 + 40,000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{40,000}{1 + 40,000 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{40,000}{40,001 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{40,000}{100.0025}$$

$$= 400.00$$

$$\text{Approximately} = 400$$

The minimum sample estimate for this study given by Taro Yamane was 400. Hence, the sample size that was selected in this study was 430. This is because Nwankwo (2016) advised the selection of a sample size that is higher than that given by the minimum estimate (i.e., Taro Yamane formula).

Sources of Data Collection

The data for this study were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary data was sourced from books, articles, and publications that were used as literature and discussions in this study. However, the data collected and analyzed were mainly derived from primary sources. Primary data refers to personal information collected directly from the source of interest, in this case. The primary data were collected through direct questionnaire administration, permitting the collection of prompt responses and perceptions from the respondents regarding instinctive fuel subsidy removal and the debacle of human security in Rivers State.

The researchers employed a face-to-face questionnaire distributed, which enabled the researchers to explain any blurred questions and ensured accurate responses by the respondents. The data was collected using a closed-ended structured questionnaire. The closed-ended questionnaire has two sections. Section A contains demographic information about the respondents such as gender, age, educational qualification, marital status, and department of the respondents. Section B, on the other hand, contains questions and statements used to obtain respondents' opinions on the instinctive removal of fuel subsidy and the debacle of human security in Rivers State. Section B of the questionnaire contains structured statements with a 4-point Likert scale response options, namely "Strongly Agree" (SA, 4 Points), "Agree" (A, 3 Points) "Disagree" (D, 2 Points), and "Strongly Disagree" (SD, 1 Point).

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected for this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and simple percentages to analyze the bio-data of the respondents (i.e., civil servants), while mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions with a criterion mean cut-off of 2.5. Also, the secondary data collected were thoroughly subjected to content analysis.

Research Setting

Rivers State was created out of the former Eastern Region by the General Yakubu Gowon administration on the 27th of May 1967 with Port Harcourt as its capital. Rivers State is among the states in the Niger Delta region that has highly concentrated drilling and oil production activities (Ayolagha & Onuegbu 2002, p.39). Rivers State is located in the delta region (South-South Zone) of Southern Nigeria. Rivers State covers 11,077 square kilometres with about 5,198,716 people (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Results**Table 1: Presentation of the Bio-Data of the Respondents**

Table 14: Presentation of the Bio-Data of the Respondents										
Gender		Age		Educational		Marital Status		Department		
Male	196 (48.3%)	20-35 yrs	142 (35.0%)	SSCE	61 (15.0%)	Single	77 (10.0%)	Registry	70 (17.2%)	
				NCE	36 (8.9%)	Married	195 (48.0%)	Internal Revenue	56 (13.8%)	
		36-50 yrs	199 (49.0%)	OND/HND	88 (21.7%)	Separated	54 (13.3%)	Health	49 (12.1%)	
				Bachelor Degree	169 (41.6%)	Divorced	38 (9.4%)	Works/Transport	95 (23.4%)	
Female	210 (51.7%)	51-65 yrs	65 (16.0%)	Master Deree	42 (10.3%)	Widow/ Widower	42 (10.3%)	Justice	38 (9.4%)	
				PhD	10 (2.5%)			Legislature	53 (13.1%)	
				Total	406 (100%)	Total	406 (100%)	Total	406 (100%)	
				Total	406 (100%)	Total	406 (100%)	Total	406 (100%)	

Table 1 shows that female civil servants, having 210 respondents (51.7%) dominated their male counterparts, civil servants within the age bracket of 36-50 years having 199 respondents (49.0%) dominated other age classification. Also, civil servants with Bachelor Degree, having 169 respondents (41.6%) dominated. The married civil servants, having 195 respondents (48.0%), dominate the other marital status. Furthermore, the civil servants from the Works/Transport Department/Parastatals/Units with 95 respondents (23.4%) dominated other units or departments.

Research Question 1: How does politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impede social security in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on how politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impedes social security in Rivers State

S/N	How politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impedes social security in Rivers State include:	N = 406		Decision
		Mean	SD	
1	Fuel subsidy removal raised transport and goods costs that harmed low-income households	3.73	.49	SA
2	Higher operational costs for businesses led to layoffs and unemployment that worsened poverty and insecurity	3.74	.47	SA
3	Opposition to subsidy removal triggered protests, strikes, and clashes that destabilized social order	3.72	.51	SA
4	Rising fuel costs increased healthcare services, sicknesses, and death	3.67	.51	SA
5	Economic hardship from subsidy removal can drive individuals to crimes like robbery, kidnapping, and fraud	3.75	.47	SA
6	Protests due to increasing fuel prices weakened law enforcement and security operations	3.71	.48	SA
Grand Mean		3.72	0.49	SA

SA (Strongly Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while SD (Strongly Disagree) = < 2.50 .

Table 2 shows that the mean rating and standard deviation on how politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impedes social security in Rivers State include: economic hardship from subsidy removal can drive individuals to crimes like robbery, kidnapping, and fraud (\bar{X} =3.75) in item 5, higher operational costs for businesses led to layoffs and unemployment that worsened poverty and insecurity (\bar{X} =3.74) in item 2, fuel subsidy removal raised transport and goods costs that harmed low-income households (\bar{X} =3.73) in item 1, opposition to subsidy removal triggered protests, strikes, and clashes that destabilized social order (\bar{X} =3.72) in item 3, protests due to increasing fuel prices weakened law enforcement and security operations (\bar{X} =3.71) in item 6, while the least was rising fuel costs increased healthcare services, sicknesses, and death (\bar{X} =3.67) in item 4. Furthermore, the grand mean score of 3.72 indicates that items 1-6 relate to how politicisation of fuel subsidy removal impedes social security in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What are the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the economic security in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the economic security in Rivers State

S/N	The effects of fuel subsidy removal on the economic security in Rivers State include:	N = 406		Decision
		Mean	SD	
1	Increasing inflation in the cost of essential commodities and services	3.72	.49	SA
2	Decline in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) due to rising operational expenses	3.74	.51	SA
3	Higher medical costs due to increased transportation and operational expenses in hospitals	3.76	.47	SA
4	Higher demand for government assistance programmes and palliatives to cushion economic hardship	3.73	.48	SA
5	Companies downsizing due to increased costs, reducing employment opportunities	3.71	.50	SA
6	Decline in disposable income and household purchasing power that affects savings and investments	3.77	.46	SA
Grand Mean		3.74	0.49	SA

SA (Strongly Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while SD (Strongly Disagree) = < 2.50 .

Table 3 shows that the mean rating and standard deviation on the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the economic security in Rivers State include: decline in disposable income and household purchasing power that affects savings and investments (\bar{X} =3.77) in item 6, higher medical costs due to increased transportation and operational expenses in hospitals (\bar{X} =3.76) in item 3, decline in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) due to rising operational expenses (\bar{X} =3.74) in item 2, higher demand for government assistance programmes and palliatives to cushion economic hardship (\bar{X} =3.73) in item 4, increasing inflation in the cost of essential commodities and services (\bar{X} =3.72) in item 1, while the least was companies downsizing due to increased costs,

reducing employment opportunities (\bar{X} = 3.71) in item 5. Furthermore, the grand mean score of 3.74 indicates that items 1-6 relate to the effects of fuel subsidy removal on the economic security in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What are the impacts of politicization of fuel subsidy removal on physical security in Rivers State?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on the impacts of politicization of fuel subsidy removal on physical security in Rivers State

S/N	The impacts of politicization of fuel subsidy removal on physical security in Rivers State include:	N = 406		Decision
		Mean	SD	
1	Confrontations between security forces and protesters escalated violent clashes that led to injuries or fatalities	3.77	.44	SA
2	Public demonstrations that increased rate of vandalism of government infrastructure, public properties, fuel stations, and transport facilities	3.70	.51	SA
3	Opposition groups inciting protests, strikes, and violence to destabilize the ruling government	3.78	.44	SA
4	Heightened conflicts between political parties exploiting subsidy removal for political gains	3.69	.48	SA
5	Business closures and restricted movement due to security concerns	3.85	.37	SA
6	Heavy-handed responses from law enforcement agencies to agitations and protests led to human rights violations and reprisals	3.76	.43	SA
Grand Mean		3.76	0.45	SA

SA (Strongly Agree) = ≥ 2.50 while SD (Strongly Disagree) = < 2.50 .

Table 4 shows that the mean rating and standard deviation on the impacts of politicization of fuel subsidy removal on physical security in Rivers State include: business closures and restricted movement due to security concerns (\bar{X} = 3.85) in item 5, opposition groups inciting protests, strikes and violence to destabilize the ruling government (\bar{X} = 3.78) in item 3, confrontations between security forces and protesters escalated violent clashes that led to injuries or fatalities (\bar{X} = 3.77) in item 1, heavy-handed responses from law enforcement agencies to agitations and protests led to human rights violations and reprisals (\bar{X} = 3.76) in item 6, public demonstrations that increased rate of vandalism of government infrastructure, public properties, fuel stations, and transport facilities (\bar{X} = 3.70) in item 2, while the least was heightened conflicts between political parties exploiting subsidy removal for political gains (\bar{X} = 3.69) in item 4. Furthermore, the grand mean score of 3.76 indicates that items 1-6 relate to the impacts of politicisation of fuel subsidy removal on physical security in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Table 2 revealed a grand mean score of 3.72, which indicated that the politicization of fuel subsidy removal impacted transportation and business operations as well as had adverse inflationary, socio-economic consequences that significantly impede social security, affected

healthcare services, deepened economic hardship, and accentuated unemployment, poverty, and insecurity in Rivers State. This finding is consistent with the studies (Obasi & Umeh, 2020; Okafor & Adeyemi, 2020; Uche, 2021; Ibrahim & Okonkwo, 2022) that the removal of fuel subsidies escalated violent confrontations between civilians and security forces, and increased commodities prices, transport costs, business operational costs, leading to business closure, unemployment upsurge, reduced medical expense, and increased economic hardships that is linked to worsened health outcome, increased social unrest and crime, weakened social cohesion, and individual household struggles and poverty. Also, this finding agrees with the studies by Adebayo and Ojo (2021), and Eze & Nwankwo (2022) that rising fuel prices naturally lead to inflation, increasing cost of essential commodities and transportation, thereby reducing purchasing power that negatively impacts household welfare.

Table 3 revealed a grand mean score of 3.74, which indicated that fuel subsidy removal led to increasing inflation, SMEs (small business) struggles, rising commodities prices, and other sudden cost hikes that increased overhead expenses, outright business closure, reduced productivity, and high demand for palliatives, which significantly affected economic security in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with previous studies by (Ibrahim & Nwankwo, 2019; Eze & Uchenna, 2020; Uche & Nduka, 2020; Okonkwo & Adeyemi, 2021; Adebayo & Salisu, 2022; Aluko, 2022) that subsidy removal leads to higher fuel prices, inflation, costs of goods and services, and transportation expenses leading to strained household incomes, SMEs struggles, business downsizings and/or outright closure, and poverty among other economic impacts that exacerbated health inequalities in Nigeria.

Table 4 revealed a grand mean score of 3.76, which indicated that the politicization of fuel subsidy removal led to the persistent civil unrest, and heightened conflicts between political parties that significantly exacerbated injuries and fatalities, clashes between rival party supporters, and physical security challenges in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with studies by (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2020; Oluwole & Adegbite, 2020; Akinola & Okonkwo, 2021; Nwosu & Eke, 2022) that politicizing fuel subsidy removal heightened protests championed by political opponents of the government as well as recurrent pattern of civil unrest such as the 2012 "Occupy Nigeria" movement that escalated into violent confrontations, clashes between rival party supporters, and violence, especially when law enforcement agencies resort to forceful dispersal methods, leading to casualties. Also, the finding that politicizing fuel subsidy removal heightened conflicts between political parties exploiting subsidy removal for political gains leading to the escalation of violent clashes in Rivers State. This finding is consistent with the observations in the studies by (Aluko, 2021; Ibrahim & Chukwu, 2022) that fuel subsidy debates are often used as a battleground for political rivalries that often escalated violent clashes between rival party supporters, further destabilizing the security situation.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the politicization of fuel subsidy removal increased economic hardship, triggered violent confrontations between protesters and security forces, incited public unrest, and weakened law enforcement capacities, thereby creating a cycle of social, and physical insecurity in Rivers State. Furthermore, fuel subsidy removal led to inflation, declining business sustainability, rising medical costs, increased government welfare demands, business disruptions,

job losses, and reduced household purchasing power, which collectively contributed to economic insecurity in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. The government should strengthen the implementation of social welfare programmes such as transportation subsidies, food assistance programmes, and direct cash transfers to support and cushion the financial burden on struggling households and vulnerable populations.
2. The government should provide financial support and incentives for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by establishing low-interest loan schemes, tax relief programmes, and energy subsidies for small businesses to help them manage increased costs and sustain operations as well as stabilizing the economy amidst the rising inflation from fuel price fluctuations.
3. The government should strategically adopt and implement a “Conflict-Sensitive and De-Escalation and Law Enforcement (CSDLE) policy by training security personnel on human rights-based policing, and establishing structured communication channels between the government, civil society, and political stakeholders. This will help foster trust, proactively address grievances, and minimize the risks of human rights violations, injuries, and fatalities even during protests.

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IHEJIRIKA, HAPPINESS (PhD); CHIEME, EZEMONYE (PhD) & AKPATI, IFEANYI LOUIS (PhD)
INSTINCTIVE FUEL SUBSIDY REMOVAL AND THE DEBACLE OF HUMAN SECURITY IN...

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