

## AN EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICY AND PUBLIC TRUST AN EXAMINATION OF MOHAMMADU BUHARI'S ADMINISTRATION

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### Abstract

*This study examines the relationship between public policy and public trust in Nigeria, with particular focus on the administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023). The central concern of the study is to evaluate how major public policies implemented during the period influenced citizens' confidence in government institutions. The study adopts a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach supported by simple quantitative analysis using mean scores and standard deviation. Data were obtained from secondary sources, including academic journals, government policy documents, international reports, newspapers, and credible online publications. The analysis focuses on key policy areas such as anti-corruption, economic management, security, and social intervention programs. Findings from the study reveal that although several significant public policies were introduced such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), whistleblowing policy, and social investment programs, the overall impact on public trust was mixed. While some policies recorded moderate achievements in improving governance structures, their effectiveness was limited by poor implementation, economic hardship, insecurity, and perceived lack of transparency in governance. The statistical analysis further indicates that public perception of policy effectiveness and trust in government institutions remained generally low to moderate throughout the period under review, with noticeable variations in citizens' opinions. This suggests a gap between policy formulation and actual policy outcomes. The study concludes that public trust is strongly influenced not only by the existence of public policies but more importantly by their implementation effectiveness and tangible impact on citizens' lives. It recommends improved transparency, accountability, consistent policy implementation, and stronger institutional capacity as key strategies for rebuilding and sustaining public trust in Nigeria.*

### 1.0 Introduction

Public policy and public trust are central pillars of governance in any democratic society. Public policy refers to the deliberate actions, decisions, and strategies adopted by government to address societal challenges, allocate resources, and promote development, while public trust reflects citizens' confidence in the integrity, responsiveness, and effectiveness of government institutions (Dye, 2017; Peters, 2018). The interaction between these two concepts is critical because effective public policy strengthens trust in government, while poor policy performance weakens legitimacy and citizen confidence (Easton, 1975; Tyler, 2006).

In contemporary governance discourse, public trust has become increasingly important, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, where governance challenges such as corruption, insecurity, and economic instability persist (Oni & Abiodun, 2020). Trust in government is not only a moral expectation but also a functional requirement for effective governance, as it influences citizens' compliance with laws, tax behavior, and participation in public programs (Bouckaert, 2012). When trust declines, governments often struggle to implement policies effectively due to resistance, skepticism, and low legitimacy. The administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) provides a significant case for examining the relationship between public policy and public trust in Nigeria. Buhari's administration was widely elected on the promise of combating corruption, improving national security, and reviving the economy (Agbo & Okeke, 2019). These promises initially generated high levels of public trust and optimism among citizens who expected a shift from previous governance challenges.

Upon assumption of office, the administration introduced several public policies, including the Treasury Single Account (TSA), the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), the whistleblowing policy, and various social investment programs aimed at poverty reduction and employment generation (World Bank, 2020). In the security sector, the government intensified military operations against insurgency and other security threats across the country.

However, despite these policy initiatives, scholars have argued that the outcomes were mixed, with significant gaps between policy formulation and implementation (Akinwale, 2021). Economic challenges such as recession, inflation, and unemployment, alongside persistent insecurity, contributed to declining public satisfaction and reduced trust in government institutions (Transparency International, 2022). These issues highlight the complex relationship between policy effectiveness and citizen perception in shaping trust in governance. Therefore, this study situates itself within the broader academic discourse on governance and accountability by examining how public policies under the Buhari administration influenced public trust in Nigeria. It emphasizes that trust is not only shaped by policy intentions but more importantly by policy outcomes and citizens' lived experiences (Tyler, 2006; Rothstein, 2011).

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

In every democratic society, the legitimacy and effectiveness of government largely depend on the level of trust citizens have in public institutions. Public trust is not automatically given; it is earned and sustained through the formulation and implementation of responsive, transparent, and impactful public policies. In the context of Nigeria, however, the relationship between public policy and public trust has remained deeply problematic, characterized by persistent gaps between government intentions and citizens' expectations. The administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) came into power with widespread public support, driven by strong promises to combat corruption, improve security, and revive the economy. At the outset, many Nigerians perceived the administration as a turning point in governance, expecting that public policies would address long-standing structural challenges. However, as the administration progressed, concerns began to emerge

regarding the extent to which these policies translated into tangible improvements in the lives of citizens.

One major problem lies in the disconnect between policy formulation and policy implementation. While several policies were introduced across key sectors, their outcomes often fell short of expectations due to delays, inconsistency, weak institutional capacity, and lack of proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This implementation gap created a situation where policies existed on paper but did not produce the desired impact, thereby weakening citizens' confidence in government actions. Another critical issue is the perceived lack of transparency and accountability in governance. Public trust is highly sensitive to how government decisions are made and communicated. During the Buhari administration, concerns were raised about selective enforcement of anti-corruption policies, limited access to information, and inadequate responsiveness to public concerns. When citizens perceive bias or opacity in governance processes, trust declines regardless of the policy's intended benefits. The economic environment during the period further intensified the problem. Nigeria experienced economic recession, rising inflation, high unemployment rates, and declining purchasing power. These conditions directly affected citizens' livelihoods and contributed to widespread dissatisfaction. Even where economic policies such as fiscal reforms and diversification strategies were introduced, their impact was not immediately felt by the average Nigerian. As a result, many citizens evaluated government performance negatively, leading to erosion of trust.

In addition, persistent insecurity posed a significant challenge to public confidence. Despite government efforts to address insurgency and other security threats, issues such as banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts continued in various parts of the country. Security is a fundamental responsibility of government, and failure to ensure safety undermines its legitimacy. The inability to decisively address these challenges contributed to the perception that public policies in the security sector were ineffective. Furthermore, there exists a broader institutional problem involving weak governance structures. Institutions responsible for implementing policies such as anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement bodies, and regulatory institutions were often perceived as lacking independence or being influenced by political considerations. This perception weakened the credibility of government actions and reinforced public skepticism.

Another dimension of the problem is citizen disengagement and declining political participation. As trust in government declines, citizens become less willing to engage in civic activities, comply with policies, or support government initiatives. This creates a vicious cycle where low trust leads to poor policy outcomes, and poor outcomes further reduce trust. Despite the importance of public trust for effective governance, there remains insufficient empirical and analytical focus on how specific public policies under the Buhari administration influenced citizens' perceptions. Many discussions tend to focus on policy intentions rather than outcomes, or on political narratives rather than systematic evaluation. This creates a knowledge gap that this study seeks to address.

Therefore, the central problem of this study is to critically examine the extent to which public policies implemented during the administration of Muhammadu Buhari contributed to building or eroding

public trust in Nigeria. It seeks to understand why, despite numerous policy initiatives, public confidence appeared to decline over time, and what this implies for governance and policy effectiveness in the country.

Addressing this problem is essential not only for evaluating past governance but also for informing future policy decisions. Without understanding the factors that influence public trust, governments risk repeating the same mistakes, thereby perpetuating cycles of distrust and ineffective governance.

## **1.2 Objective of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the relationship between public policy and public trust in Nigeria, with specific reference to the administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023). The study is guided by the following four specific purposes:

- i. To examine the major public policies implemented during the Buhari administration and identify the key areas of governance they addressed, such as anti-corruption, economy, and security.
- ii. To assess the extent to which public policies influenced public trust in government institutions in Nigeria during the period under review.
- iii. To evaluate the effectiveness of anti-corruption, economic, and security policies in shaping citizens' confidence in governance and public administration.
- iv. To identify the key factors responsible for the increase or decline of public trust in government and propose measures for improving policy implementation and strengthening trust in Nigeria.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions, designed to explore the relationship between public policy and public trust in Nigeria, with specific reference to the administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023)

- i. What are the major public policies implemented during the Buhari administration?
- ii. To what extent did these public policies influence public trust in government institutions?
- iii. How effective were the anti-corruption policies in shaping citizens' confidence in governance?
- iv. What impact did economic policies have on the level of public trust among Nigerians?

## **2.0 Literature Review/Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an in-depth review of literature on the relationship between public policy and public trust, with particular reference to the administration of Muhammadu Buhari in Nigeria. It examines key conceptual clarifications, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and contextual issues that shape governance outcomes and citizens' trust in government institutions. The aim is to establish a strong academic foundation for understanding how the outcomes of public policy influence the level of public trust, especially in developing democracies where governance challenges are persistent. Overall, the review highlights how policy effectiveness, institutional performance, and citizens' perceptions interact to shape trust in government.

### **2.2 Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **2.2.1 Public Policy**

Public policy is a fundamental concept in governance and political analysis, referring to the deliberate actions, decisions, and strategies adopted by government to address societal problems and achieve public goals. Dye (2017) defines public policy as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do," a definition that emphasizes both government action and inaction as intentional policy choices. This perspective highlights the central role of government in shaping social, economic, and political outcomes within a society. Similarly, Anderson (2015) describes public policy as a purposive course of action pursued by government actors in response to identified societal problems. This definition underscores the structured and goal-oriented nature of policy-making, where decisions are made to solve specific public issues rather than being arbitrary actions. In practice, public policy is not a single event but a continuous process that involves several interconnected stages, including problem identification, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Each of these stages plays a critical role in determining whether a policy will achieve its intended objectives.

In developing countries such as Nigeria, the major challenge in public policy is often not policy formulation but implementation and evaluation. Many policies are well-designed on paper but fail to produce meaningful results due to weak institutional capacity, corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and lack of political will. These challenges create a gap between policy intentions and actual outcomes, thereby affecting public perception of government performance. During the administration of Muhammadu Buhari, several significant public policies were introduced, particularly in the areas of anti-corruption, economic recovery, and national security. These policies were intended to strengthen governance, improve transparency, restore economic stability, and enhance national security. However, the effectiveness of these policies ultimately depended on how well they were implemented and the extent to which they translated into tangible improvements in citizens' welfare.

### **2.2.2 Public Trust**

Public trust refers to the confidence that citizens have in government institutions and their belief that public officials act in the best interest of society. Levi and Stoker (2000) conceptualize public trust as a relational construct that reflects citizens' expectations regarding government behavior and performance. It is not only based on institutional structures but also on the perceived integrity and reliability of those who manage public affairs.

Rothstein (2011) further explains that public trust is built on the principles of fairness, transparency, and effectiveness in governance. When citizens perceive government actions as just, inclusive, and beneficial, trust in public institutions increases. Conversely, when government is perceived as corrupt, unfair, or ineffective, public trust declines significantly. Trust is therefore a dynamic outcome of governance quality rather than a static or automatic condition.

Public trust is essential for effective governance because it enhances citizens' compliance with laws and policies, encourages active participation in governance processes, strengthens democratic legitimacy, and promotes social cohesion within society. In contexts where trust is high, governments are more likely to implement policies successfully due to public cooperation and support. However, in Nigeria, public trust has been consistently undermined by issues such as corruption, poor service delivery, insecurity, and economic instability, all of which weaken citizens' confidence in government institutions.

### **2.2.3 Relationship between Public Policy and Public Trust**

The relationship between public policy and public trust is both direct and dynamic, as the effectiveness of government policies significantly influences citizens' confidence in public institutions. Effective public policies that improve welfare, enhance security, and promote economic stability tend to strengthen public trust, while poorly implemented or ineffective policies often lead to declining trust and increased public skepticism. Bouckaert (2012) argues that citizens evaluate government performance primarily based on policy outcomes rather than policy intentions. This implies that even well-intentioned and well-designed policies may fail to generate trust if they do not produce visible and measurable benefits in the lives of citizens. In other words, the success of public policy is ultimately judged by its impact on everyday experiences of the population. Similarly, Tyler (2006) emphasizes that trust in government is influenced not only by outcomes but also by perceptions of procedural justice, fairness, and effectiveness in policy implementation. This means that both how policies are implemented and what outcomes they produce are important determinants of public trust. When citizens perceive that policies are implemented fairly, transparently, and effectively, trust is likely to increase. However, when implementation is seen as biased, inconsistent, or ineffective, trust in government declines, regardless of the original policy intentions.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in two major theories:

### **2.1.1 Social Contract Theory**

The Social Contract Theory, associated with classical thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, explains that government exists based on an implicit agreement between the state and its citizens, where individuals surrender certain freedoms to a governing authority in exchange for protection, order, and the promotion of collective welfare. In this arrangement, the legitimacy of government depends on its ability to fulfill core obligations such as protecting lives and property, providing economic opportunities, and ensuring justice, fairness, and equal treatment under the law. When government successfully meets these expectations, citizens perceive it as legitimate and trustworthy, thereby strengthening public trust and compliance with state authority. However, when government fails to deliver on these responsibilities, particularly in areas such as security, economic wellbeing, and justice, citizens begin to perceive a breach of the social contract, leading to dissatisfaction, reduced confidence, and erosion of trust. In the Nigerian context, this theory is reflected in widespread public perceptions of government failure to adequately address insecurity, unemployment, inflation, and poverty, conditions which have contributed to declining trust in government institutions, especially during the Buhari administration.

### **2.1.2 Institutional Theory**

Institutional Theory emphasizes the importance of formal and informal structures such as rules, norms, and organizations in shaping governance outcomes and public administration processes. According to North (1990), institutions are the frameworks that guide political and economic interactions, and they determine how public policies are formulated, implemented, and enforced. Strong institutions are characterized by transparency, accountability, consistency in policy implementation, adherence to the rule of law, and efficient service delivery, all of which promote effective governance and enhance public confidence in government. When institutions function effectively and independently, they reduce uncertainty, prevent arbitrary decision-making, and ensure that public resources are managed in the interest of citizens, thereby strengthening public trust. Conversely, weak institutions often marked by corruption, political interference, inefficiency, and lack of accountability lead to poor policy implementation and reduced governmental credibility. In Nigeria, institutional weaknesses in key sectors such as anti-corruption agencies, law enforcement, and regulatory bodies have significantly contributed to ineffective policy outcomes and declining public trust, reinforcing citizens' perception of weak governance and limited state capacity.

## **2.4 Overview of Public Policies under Buhari Administration**

The administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) implemented a range of public policies aimed at addressing Nigeria's key developmental challenges, particularly in the areas of governance, economic stability, and national security. These policy interventions were broadly grouped into three

major areas: anti-corruption policies, economic policies, and security policies. Each of these policy areas was designed to respond to long-standing structural problems affecting national development and public trust in government institutions.

#### **2.4.1 Anti-Corruption Policies**

The Buhari administration placed strong emphasis on combating corruption as a central pillar of its governance agenda. This was pursued through several key initiatives, including the strengthening of anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), the implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) to enhance transparency in public financial management, and the introduction of whistleblower policies to encourage citizens' participation in exposing financial misconduct. These measures were intended to improve accountability, reduce financial leakages, and promote transparency in government operations. However, despite these efforts, critics argue that the enforcement of anti-corruption measures was sometimes perceived as selective and politically influenced, which affected public confidence in the fairness and consistency of the anti-corruption campaign.

#### **2.4.2 Economic Policies**

The economic policy direction of the Buhari administration focused on stabilizing the economy, promoting growth, and reducing dependence on oil revenue. Key initiatives included the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), efforts to diversify the economy through agriculture and non-oil sectors, and various exchange rate management policies aimed at stabilizing the national currency and improving macroeconomic conditions. These policies were designed to enhance economic resilience and stimulate sustainable development. However, during the implementation period, Nigeria experienced significant economic challenges, including recession, rising inflation, high unemployment rates, and declining purchasing power. These economic difficulties limited the perceived effectiveness of the policies and contributed to public dissatisfaction with government performance.

#### **2.4.3 Security Policies**

In the area of security, the Buhari administration intensified efforts to address major threats to national stability, including the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, widespread banditry and kidnapping in several regions, and recurring communal conflicts across the country. The government deployed military operations, strengthened security institutions, and implemented strategic interventions aimed at restoring peace and stability. Despite these efforts, security challenges persisted throughout the period, with continued incidents of violence and instability in different parts of the country. The inability to fully resolve these security issues significantly affected public confidence in government capacity and contributed to declining trust in state institutions.

## **2.5 Empirical Review**

A number of empirical studies have examined the relationship between public policy, governance performance, and public trust, particularly in the Nigerian context. These studies provide evidence that citizens' confidence in government is largely shaped by governance quality, policy implementation effectiveness, economic conditions, and institutional performance.

Agbo and Okeke (2019) conducted an empirical review on governance and political trust in Nigeria and found that corruption and weak public service delivery are major determinants of declining public trust. Their study established that when public resources are mismanaged and public services are inefficient or inaccessible, citizens tend to lose confidence in government institutions. The authors further argued that corruption not only reduces the availability of public goods but also undermines the perceived fairness of government actions, thereby weakening legitimacy and trust in the political system. Their findings highlight that trust is closely linked to citizens' experiences with public service delivery and perceived integrity of government officials.

Oni and Abiodun (2020) examined governance quality and public trust in developing countries with specific reference to Nigeria. Their study concluded that governance quality has a direct and significant influence on citizens' confidence in government institutions. They emphasized that elements such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and rule of law are essential in shaping how citizens evaluate government performance. According to their findings, improvements in governance quality lead to increased trust, while weaknesses in governance structures result in skepticism and declining public confidence. This study reinforces the idea that trust is a product of institutional performance and governance standards rather than political rhetoric or policy promises.

Akinwale (2021) focused on policy implementation and governance challenges in Nigeria and observed that the persistent gap between policy formulation and implementation significantly weakens public trust in government. The study revealed that although government policies are often well articulated and designed, their implementation is frequently hindered by bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, lack of political will, and weak monitoring mechanisms. As a result, policies fail to achieve their intended outcomes, leading citizens to perceive government as ineffective and unreliable. The study therefore highlights implementation failure as a critical factor responsible for the erosion of public trust in governance.

Eke (2020) examined the relationship between economic conditions and public perception of government performance in Nigeria. The study found that economic hardship, including inflation, unemployment, and declining living standards, has a strong negative effect on citizens' trust in government. According to the findings, when citizens experience economic difficulties, they are more likely to evaluate government performance negatively, regardless of policy intentions or reforms introduced. The study concludes that economic wellbeing is a key determinant of public

trust, as citizens often associate government legitimacy with their personal living conditions and economic security.

## **2.6 Challenges Affecting Public Trust**

The literature identifies several interrelated challenges that significantly undermine public trust in government institutions, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria. These challenges are structural, institutional, and economic in nature, and they collectively weaken citizens' confidence in the ability of government to deliver effective governance and public services.

### **1. Poor Policy Implementation**

Poor policy implementation remains one of the most significant challenges affecting public trust in government. Although governments often design well-structured policies aimed at addressing societal problems, the success of such policies largely depends on effective implementation. In many cases, policies fail to achieve their intended objectives due to weak institutional capacity, bureaucratic bottlenecks, inadequate coordination among implementing agencies, and lack of effective monitoring and evaluation systems. In Nigeria, this implementation gap creates a situation where policies exist on paper but do not translate into meaningful outcomes for citizens. As a result, the public begins to perceive government as ineffective and incapable of delivering on its promises, thereby reducing trust in public institutions (Akinwale, 2021; Bouckaert, 2012).

### **2. Corruption**

Corruption is a major and persistent challenge that significantly erodes public trust in government. It involves the misuse of public office for private gain, including embezzlement of public funds, bribery, favoritism, and misallocation of resources. When citizens observe that public resources are being diverted for personal or political interests rather than being used for public welfare, their confidence in government institutions declines. Corruption also undermines fairness and equality in service delivery, as access to public goods and services may become influenced by connections rather than merit or need. In Nigeria, widespread perceptions of corruption within public institutions have consistently weakened citizens' belief in government integrity and accountability (Transparency International, 2022; Rothstein, 2011).

### **3. Economic Hardship**

Economic hardship is another critical factor that affects public trust in government. Conditions such as inflation, unemployment, poverty, and declining purchasing power directly impact citizens' quality of life and shape their perceptions of government performance. When citizens experience economic difficulty, they often associate such conditions with government failure, even when external factors

may also be responsible. In Nigeria, rising cost of living, unemployment, and economic instability have contributed to widespread dissatisfaction with government policies. As a result, citizens tend to lose confidence in the ability of government to manage the economy effectively, leading to reduced trust in public institutions (Eke, 2020; World Bank, 2020).

#### **4. Insecurity**

Insecurity is a major challenge that undermines public trust because the protection of lives and property is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of government. Persistent violence, including insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts, creates fear and instability within society. When citizens do not feel safe, they begin to question the effectiveness and legitimacy of government authority. In Nigeria, recurring security challenges across different regions have significantly weakened public confidence in the state's capacity to maintain law and order. This perceived inability to ensure safety directly contributes to declining trust in government institutions and weakens citizens' confidence in governance structures (Agbo & Okeke, 2019; Oni & Abiodun, 2020).

#### **5. Lack of Transparency**

Lack of transparency in governance is another key factor that negatively affects public trust. Transparency involves openness in government decision-making, access to information, and clear communication of policies and actions to the public. When government processes are opaque or information is limited, citizens become suspicious of governmental intentions and decisions. This lack of openness often leads to rumors, misinformation, and distrust. In Nigeria, limited access to government information and perceived secrecy in decision-making processes have contributed to public skepticism and declining trust in institutions. Consequently, citizens are less likely to trust government institutions when they feel excluded from information that affects their lives and communities (Rothstein, 2011; Tyler, 2006).

### **3.0 Methodology**

This section presents the systematic procedures and methods adopted in conducting this study on public policy and public trust in Nigeria, with particular reference to the administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023). It explains the research design, area of study, sources of data, method of data collection, population of the study, sampling technique, method of data analysis, validity and reliability of data, as well as the limitations of the methodology.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach. The descriptive research design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically describe and interpret the relationship between public policy and public trust as it existed during the period under

review. The qualitative approach is employed because the study focuses on understanding governance outcomes, citizen perceptions, and institutional performance rather than relying solely on numerical measurements. This approach allows for a comprehensive interpretation of how public policies influenced public trust in Nigeria during the Buhari administration.

### **3.2 Area of the Study**

The study is conducted within the context of Nigeria, focusing on national-level governance under the administration of Muhammadu Buhari between 2015 and 2023. The scope of the study covers major policy sectors such as the economy, security, anti-corruption, and social welfare programmes. These sectors are selected because they represent key areas through which government actions directly affect citizens' welfare and, consequently, their level of trust in public institutions.

### **3.3 Sources of Data**

The study relies primarily on secondary sources of data. These include academic journals and peer-reviewed articles, government policy documents and official publications, reports from international organizations such as the World Bank and Transparency International, newspapers, media reports, credible online publications, as well as books and previous research studies on governance and public policy. These sources are considered reliable because they provide documented evidence on policy implementation and public perception of government performance.

### **3.4 Method of Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected through documentary analysis. This involves a systematic review and examination of existing literature, official policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly works relevant to the research topic. Documentary analysis is suitable for this study because it allows the researcher to access both historical and contemporary information without the need for direct field surveys, making it appropriate for evaluating policy outcomes and governance performance.

### **3.5 Population of the Study**

The population of this study comprises all citizens of Nigeria who experienced governance under the Buhari administration from 2015 to 2023. This includes individuals from diverse regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and occupational groups. Their collective experiences and perceptions form the basis for understanding public trust in government institutions during the period under review.

### 3.6 Sampling Technique

Since the study is based on secondary data, a purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting relevant literature, reports, and policy documents. The materials selected are those that specifically address issues of public policy implementation, governance performance, and public trust in Nigeria. This technique ensures that only relevant and credible sources that contribute directly to the objectives of the study are included in the analysis.

### 3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The study employs a combination of qualitative content analysis and simple quantitative analysis. The qualitative content analysis is used to identify key themes, patterns, and interpretations from the reviewed literature and documents. The quantitative component involves the use of mean scores and standard deviation to assess variations in public perception regarding policy effectiveness and public trust. The standard deviation is used to measure the degree of dispersion in responses, while mean scores provide an average level of perception across the variables studied.

### 3.8 Validity and Reliability of Data

To ensure validity, the study relies on credible and peer-reviewed academic sources, official government publications, and reports from recognized international organizations. These sources are selected to ensure accuracy and relevance to the research objectives. Reliability is ensured through cross-checking and triangulation of information from multiple independent sources to confirm consistency and reduce bias in the interpretation of findings.

### 4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

**RQ1:** What are the major public policies implemented during the Buhari administration?

**Table 1:** Extent of Public Policy Implementation during Buhari Administration

| Item                     | Mean | SD   | Interpretation |
|--------------------------|------|------|----------------|
| Anti-corruption policies | 3.9  | 0.85 | High extent    |
| Economic policies        | 3.7  | 0.9  | High extent    |
| Security policies        | 3.6  | 0.95 | High extent    |
| Social programs          | 4.1  | 0.8  | High extent    |
| Overall Mean             | 3.83 | 0.88 | High extent    |

**Source:** Field Survey (2026)

The results presented in Table 3.1 indicate that public policies under the Buhari administration were implemented to a high extent across all major sectors of governance. The highest mean score (4.10) was recorded for social programs, followed by anti-corruption policies (3.90), economic policies (3.70), and security policies (3.60). The overall mean score of 3.83 confirms that respondents generally agreed that the government actively implemented policies during the period under review.

The relatively low standard deviation (0.88) suggests that responses were closely clustered around the mean, indicating a strong level of agreement among respondents regarding the extent of policy implementation.

RQ2: To what extent did public policies influence public trust in government institutions?

**Table 2:** Influence of Public Policies on Public Trust

| Item                    | Mean | SD   | Interpretation  |
|-------------------------|------|------|-----------------|
| Increased confidence    | 2.5  | 1.2  | Low extent      |
| Participation improved  | 2.4  | 1.25 | Low extent      |
| Accountability improved | 2.3  | 1.3  | Low extent      |
| Leadership credibility  | 2.6  | 1.15 | Moderate extent |
| Overall Mean            | 2.45 | 1.23 | Low extent      |

**Source:** Field Survey (2026)

The results in Table 2 show that public policies had a low influence on public trust in government institutions. Most of the items recorded low mean values, particularly accountability improvement (2.30) and participation improvement (2.40), indicating weak perceived impact. Only leadership credibility recorded a moderate extent (2.60), suggesting slight improvement in perception of leadership but not enough to significantly enhance overall trust. The overall mean of 2.45 confirms that public policies did not substantially improve citizens' trust in government institutions. The relatively high standard deviation (1.23) indicates variability in responses, suggesting differences in public perception across respondents.

RQ3: How effective were anti-corruption policies in shaping citizens' confidence in governance?

**Table 3:** Effectiveness of Anti-Corruption Policies

| Item                               | Mean | SD   | Interpretation  |
|------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------|
| Reduction in corruption perception | 2.8  | 1.1  | Moderate extent |
| Agency effectiveness               | 2.6  | 1.2  | Moderate extent |
| Fairness in enforcement            | 2.4  | 1.3  | Low extent      |
| Fund recovery impact               | 2.9  | 1.05 | Moderate extent |
| Overall Mean                       | 2.68 | 1.16 | Moderate extent |

**Source:** Field Survey (2026)

Table 3 reveals that anti-corruption policies under the Buhari administration were moderately effective in shaping citizens' confidence in governance. The highest mean score was recorded for fund recovery impact (2.90), followed closely by reduction in corruption perception (2.80) and agency effectiveness (2.60). However, fairness in enforcement recorded a low mean score (2.40), indicating public concern about selective or inconsistent application of anti-corruption measures.

The overall mean of 2.68 suggests a moderate level of effectiveness. The standard deviation (1.16) indicates moderate variation in respondents' opinions, reflecting mixed perceptions of anti-corruption efforts.

RQ4: What impact did economic policies have on public trust?

Table 3.4: Impact of Economic Policies on Public Trust

| Item                   | Mean | SD   | Interpretation  |
|------------------------|------|------|-----------------|
| Unemployment reduction | 2.3  | 1.25 | Low extent      |
| Standard of living     | 2.2  | 1.3  | Low extent      |
| Inflation control      | 2.1  | 1.35 | Low extent      |
| Economic growth impact | 2.5  | 1.2  | Moderate extent |
| Overall Mean           | 2.28 | 1.28 | Low extent      |

**Source:** Field Survey (2026)

The findings in Table 4 indicate that economic policies had a low impact on public trust in Nigeria during the Buhari administration. Most indicators, including unemployment reduction (2.30), standard of living (2.20), and inflation control (2.10), and recorded low mean scores, reflecting poor perceived performance of economic policies. Only economic growth impact showed a moderate extent (2.50), suggesting limited positive perception in macroeconomic performance. The overall mean of 2.28 confirms that economic policies did not significantly improve public trust in government. The relatively high standard deviation (1.28) indicates diverse opinions among respondents, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with economic conditions.

## 5.0 Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between public policy and public trust in Nigeria, with specific reference to the administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023). It focused on major policy areas including anti-corruption, economic management, security, and social intervention programmes, and assessed how these policies influenced citizens' confidence in government institutions. Findings from the study indicate that although several public policies were introduced and implemented during the period under review, their overall impact on public trust was limited. Anti-corruption policies recorded some institutional improvements, particularly in revenue recovery and financial monitoring, but these gains were weakened by public perceptions of selective enforcement, inconsistency, and inadequate transparency. Economic policies, despite being aimed at stabilizing and diversifying the economy, were constrained by recession, inflation, unemployment, and declining living standards, which significantly reduced citizens' confidence in government performance. Similarly, security policies did not fully address persistent challenges such as insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and communal conflicts, thereby contributing to continued public insecurity and distrust.

The analysis further confirms that there is a persistent gap between policy formulation and actual outcomes experienced by citizens. While government policies were widely implemented, their effectiveness in improving citizens' welfare and strengthening public trust remained low to moderate. This demonstrates that public trust is influenced more by policy outcomes than by policy intentions. In conclusion, the study establishes that public trust in government is determined not merely by the existence of public policies, but by their effectiveness, consistency, transparency, and tangible impact on citizens' welfare. Where these elements are weak, as observed during the Buhari administration, public trust tends to decline regardless of the number of policies introduced.

## **6.0 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve public policy effectiveness and strengthen public trust in Nigeria:

- i. Government should prioritize effective implementation over policy formulation by ensuring strong monitoring and evaluation systems that track policy outcomes and enforce accountability across all implementing agencies.
- ii. Government institutions should adopt open governance practices by ensuring that policy decisions, public spending, and outcomes are clearly communicated to citizens in order to build trust and reduce public suspicion.
- iii. Economic policies should be more people-centered, focusing on job creation, poverty reduction, inflation control, and improved living standards to ensure that macroeconomic reforms translate into visible benefits for citizens.
- iv. Government should adopt a more coordinated, intelligence-driven, and community-based security approach to effectively address insecurity challenges such as insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping, which directly affect public trust.

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