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CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN NIGERIA AND THEIR PROPHETIC ADVOCACY IN RESPONSE TO PETROL PRICE SURGES

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ABSTRACT
The persistent rise in the price of petrol in Nigeria since May 2023 has worsened the country's economic situation. It has increased the cost of transportation and food, widened socio-economic inequalities and challenged the prophetic mandate of Christian churches. The purpose of this study is to investigate the prophetic advocacy of Christian churches in response to the socio-economic impact of rising petrol prices. It examines the effect of higher petrol prices on vulnerable populations, analyses the prophetic responses of Christian churches, and identifies measures to enhance their public engagement. There appears to be a gap between the prophetic mandate of the churches to speak and act against unjust economic policies and their apparently minimal engagement with economic matters affecting the masses. Adopting a Social Gospel approach, the study conceptualizes the mission of the Church as striving for social and economic justice through advocacy for the vulnerable and threatened. Using qualitative document analysis, the study examines biblical texts, theological works, scholarly publications, church communiqués, government policies and other relevant documents without recourse to statistical analysis. The study identifies various forms of active prophetic advocacy by churches but points out that greater consistency and cooperation are needed if the goals of prophetic advocacy are to be attained. Finally, the study argues that genuine prophetic advocacy must be grounded in a moral critique of the prevailing order and directed towards improving the conditions of vulnerable and threatened people.

Keywords: Christian Churches, Prophetic Advocacy, Petrol Price Surges, Economic Justice, Common Good.

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Introduction

Petrol plays a key role in Nigeria's socio-economic fabric, as transportation, small business activities, household energy consumption, as well as the transportation of agricultural produce and manufactured goods, remains dependent on petroleum products. When Nigeria removed the petrol subsidy in May 2023, pump prices rose sharply, and the costs of transport, food and other commodities followed. The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2024) attributed the high inflation in Nigeria to a combination of the removal of the fuel subsidy, weakness in the agricultural sector and the depreciation of the exchange rate. Later evidence further revealed that poor agricultural output and the high cost of living had led to an increase in poverty and food insecurity (IMF, 2025).

Thus, petrol price rises, far from being solely a petroleum issue, become questions of economic justice, human dignity, and social well-being. Higher transport and energy prices hit low-income families, informal workers, smallholder farmers, students, and small businesses hardest. Although economic reforms may be necessary to strengthen government finances and improve market performance, their impact on ordinary citizens cannot be ignored. When such reforms increase hardship and deepen social inequalities, they raise serious ethical questions about government obligation, fairness in the distribution of economic burdens, and the protection of vulnerable members of society. According to the World Bank (2025) Nigeria's macroeconomic reforms have yet to yield adequate improvements in people's living conditions, while rising prices of essential foods, persistent poverty, and growing demands for social protection remain.

In this sense, the Christian Church in Nigeria cannot justifiably confine its mission to worship and spiritual nurture. Its biblical-prophetic tradition insists that it must challenge injustice, stand with the oppressed and play a role in transforming society. The Social Gospel tradition, in particular, recognises that the Christian faith imposes social obligations that go beyond the salvation of individual souls to concerns such as justice and human flourishing. Petrol price increases therefore provide a rich area of inquiry for determining whether Nigerian churches have translated their theological convictions into prophetic public advocacy, constructive engagement with government and practicalsolidarity with affected citizens.

Existing studies on fuel subsidy reforms in Nigeria have largely examined their economic implications, paying comparatively less attention to how these reforms affect ordinary people, their livelihoods, living conditions, and overall social well-being (Balogun, 2025; IMF, 2025). Only a few studies have dealt theologically with the churches' prophetic challenge to policies that worsen socio-economic hardship and with their partnership with the state in the search for solutions. This gap in the existing literature calls for greater attention to the social and moral dimensions of petrol price increases.In response, this study examines how Nigerian Christian churches used their prophetic voice between May2023 and 2026 to challenge rising petrol prices, advocate economic justice, and speak up for citizens whose livelihoods and well-being were adversely affected. Specifically, it considers the theological basis of this advocacy, the churches' interaction with the state, and their efforts to protect citizens from hardship, promote the well-being of all and safeguard the needs and interests of the wider society.

Statement of the problem

The elimination of Nigeria's petrol subsidy in May2023 was a landmark economic reform designed to ease fiscal pressures and create a market-determined pricing regime. Yet the reform triggered immediate and sharp increases in pump prices, transport costs and household expenditure, placing further economic strain on the vulnerable. The World Bank (2024) observed

that the reform increased the financial burden on households and businesses, making it more difficult for many people to cope with the rising cost of living and of doing business. Although there have been significant macroeconomic stabilisation gains since the reforms, poverty remains high. This highlights the importance of robust social protection and of the successful translation of economic reforms into better livelihoods.

The issue is not merely the rising cost of petrol but the social and moral impact of how economic reforms in this regard are negotiated, implemented and challenged. Indeed, when rising fuel prices impact heavily on food, transport, education, health care and livelihoods, they raise issues of justice, and there is a need to protect people's dignity, improve their well-being, and ensure that the interests of the wider society are not neglected. The state is responsible for promoting economic growth and ensuring that its benefits reach all citizens. The Church, for its part, has a prophetic responsibility to speak out against government policies that impose undue hardship on vulnerable people and to advocate more compassionate, humane, and inclusive alternatives.

However, the Church's response to petrol price increases seems to have been sporadic rather than a coherent long-term strategy of prophetic advocacy, evidence-based policy engagement, and active solidarity. Since public protest without sustained dialogue with policy makers could be ineffective, meaningful interventions must address both immediate humanitarian needs and the underlying structural causes of suffering. Separating these two aspects creates a serious gap between the nature of the problem and the solutions needed to address it. Such a disconnect risks undermining the Christian vision of social justice and weakening the Church's ability to contribute meaningfully to public debates on economic policies. Hence, this study investigates how Christian churches in Nigeria can strengthen prophetic advocacy, engage constructively with the state, press for accountability, and promote policies that safeguard the poor.

Objectives of the study

1 To examine the theological foundations of prophetic advocacy and the social responsibility of Christian churches in Nigeria in the context of rising petrol prices.

2. To access the socio-economic effects of petrol-price surges on Nigerian households, particularly low-income and economically vulnerable populations.
3. To evaluate the prophetic responses of Christian churches to rising petrol prices, focusing on public advocacy, policy criticism and engagement with government

Conceptual clarifications

Christian Churches in Nigeria: In this study, the term Christian churches refers collectively to organised Christian bodies, denominations and ecumenical organisations operating in Nigeria that demonstrate their commitment to social responsibility through theological reflection and practical engagement with societal issues. The Church is therefore viewed as a moral and prophetic institution with a responsibility to address poverty and social injustices by advocating policies that uphold human dignity, promote social welfare, and advance the common good Dorrien, G (2023a) World Council of Churches [WCC] & ACT Alliance, 2022).

Petrol Price Surges: This refers to sharp upward adjustments in the pump price of petrol and the hardship that accompanies them for individuals, households, and businesses. These increases often make transportation, production, and essential goods and services more expensive, placing additional pressure on people's daily lives and livelihoods. The study focuses particularly on the rising cost of petrol and its socio-economic effects in Nigeria following the

removal of the petrol subsidy in May 2023, covering the period to 2026. More importantly, attention is given not merely to the rising price of petrol but also to how it affects household welfare, deepens poverty, reduces purchasing power, and places a heavier burden on low-income earners and other vulnerable members of society International Monetary Fund, (IMF, 2025)

Prophetic Advocacy: This describes the Church's biblical calling to offer truthful critique of policies, practices and structures that breed injustice and to uphold fair and humane alternatives through public moral witness, policy education, constructive critique and solidarity with affected communities. It should not be mistaken for partisan political interest. Rather, it is a principled call for fairness, justice, and responsible governance, guided by moral convictions and concern for the well-being of society rather than by political affiliation or preference (Dorrien, 2023a) WCC & ACTAlliance, 2022).

Common Good: This denotes the sum of social conditions that allow people, both as individuals and as groups, to achieve their full potential more fully and moreeasily. In relation to petrol price hikes, the criterion of the common good requires that economic policies should not only secure fiscal sustainability but also take intoaccount their distributive impact on the less well-off and vulnerable (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace [PCJP], 2004).

Government Engagement: This refers to the constructive relationship between Christian churches and the state through lobbying, dialogue, challenging policies and actions, holding participating in efforts to ensure that responses to petrol price dynamics serve human dignity government to account, and undertaking joint social action projects. In this research, it denotes the Church's strategy of and social justice, rather than merely resisting them.

Theoretical framework: Social Gospel Theory

Social Gospel Theory, associated chiefly with Walter Rauschenbusch (1917), provides a suitable theological foundation for this study. It emphasises that Christian faith should be expressed not only through personal spirituality but also through practical efforts to promote social justice, human dignity, and the well-being of society. It understands Christianity as more than personal salvation and spiritual commitment; it also calls believers to confront social injustice, address economic hardship, and work towards a society where everyone can live with dignity and fairness.

The theory is particularly relevant because, although the removal of the petrol subsidy in May 2023 generated considerable savings for the Nigerian government, it also placed a heavy financial burden on many citizens. This situation highlights the need for effective social protection measures and fair policy decisions that take the welfare and living conditions of ordinary Nigerians into account.

The Social Gospel framework views the Church as a prophetic voice for moral responsibility and a driving force for positive social change. Its prophetic role involves speaking out against government policies that place an unfair burden on particular groups of people, especially the vulnerable. Through social advocacy, the Church is expected to engage government institutions constructively by presenting evidence-based arguments and practical recommendations that can promote economic fairness and social welfare. Its commitment to social responsibility must also be demonstrated through practical efforts to relieve hardship, challenge injustice, and improve the living conditions of affected communities. Importantly, the Social Gospel does not call the Church to take sides in partisan politics; rather, it encourages the Church to remain committed to justice, human dignity and the common good.

For this study, the theory is examined through three interconnected dimensions: prophetic witness, social advocacy, and transformative action. These provide the basis for evaluating how

adequately Christian churches in Nigeria have responded to petrol price increases between May 2023 and 2026. They also help identify practical ways through which the Church can strengthen its theological voice and contribute more meaningfully to public discussions and policy engagement on economic justice in Nigeria.

Relevance of the Social Gospel Theory to the study

The Social Gospel Theory is relevant to this study because it presents the Christian faith as a means of meeting both spiritual and social needs. In this view, the mission oftheChurch extends beyond worship and personal salvation to include confronting social injustice, promoting human dignity, caring for the well-being of others, and challenging unjust systems that perpetuate poverty, inequality, and human suffering. The theory is therefore suitable forexploringhow Christians respond to petrol price shocks, because the effects of suchshocks are not limitedto petrol consumption but extendto other prices, affecting transport, food, household income and nutrition.

First, the theory offers a theological justification for prophetic advocacy. The rise in petrol prices following the removal of the subsidy in May 2023 placed considerable strain on Nigeria's economy, making life more difficult for households and businesses. The World Bank (2023a) reported that the average retail price of petrol in Nigeria increased by 163% following the removal of fuel subsidy. This sharp rise placed a disproportionate burden on poor and vulnerable households, many of whom struggled to cope with the escalating cost of living. Social Gospel Theory therefore allows this study to evaluate whether the Church has spokenout sufficiently against policies, or their implementation, when they intensify economic hardship and undermine human dignity and social justice.

Second, the theory enhances the analysis of Church-government engagement inthisstudy. The prophetic calling does not imply opposition to government but engagement with it for the promotion of justice. Recent research in Nigeria increasingly suggests that the Church can promote social justice through active advocacy, education, and practical community-based initiatives. These activities reflect the Christian commitment to confronting social injustice and improving the well-being of affected communities (Okoye & Ugwu, 2026).

Third, the Social Gospel Theory provides a basis for assessing how effectively the Church stands in solidarity with citizens affected by rising petrol prices. Such commitment should go beyond publicly condemning policies that cause hardship to include providing welfare support, promoting sustainable livelihoods, raising public awareness, and engaging constructively with government agencies and non-governmental organisations. In this way, the theory brings together prophetic witness, compassion, and practical action to examine the extent to which Christian churches in Nigeria are addressing the social and economic hardships, as well as the broader justice concerns, arising from petrol price increases.

Finally, the Social Gospel Theory aligns with this study's concern for the common good. It encourages the Church to support economic policies that balance the government's financial objectives with respect for human dignity, adequate social protection, and the welfare of ordinary citizens. The theory therefore provides a relevant framework for examining how Christian churches in Nigeria can move beyond occasional reactions to economic hardship and develop sustained prophetic advocacy for policies that are fair, compassionate, and responsive to the needs of the people.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative documentary approach to explore how Christian churches in Nigeria have exercised their prophetic responsibility in responding to petrol price

increases between May 2023 and 2026. Rather than relying on interviews, questionnaires, or other forms of fieldwork, the study draws on existing materials, including theological publications, church statements, government policies, institutional reports, and socio-economic literature. These sources provide the basis for examining the Church's response to the economic difficulties experienced by Nigerians and assessing the extent of its advocacy for social justice. Documentary research is particularly suitable because it allows existing records to be examined critically in relation to their content, significance, and the circumstances in which they were produced (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research relies exclusively on secondary sources: peer-reviewed journalarticles, books, government policy papers, reports from international development agencies, official church documents, ecumenical papers, and reputable institutional reports. The sources were selected purposefully for their relevance, scholarly validity, institutional legitimacy, timeliness, and specific focus on petrol price reforms, Christian concern for the common good, prophetic advocacy, government accountability, and social responsibility. Particular consideration is given to literature on the implications of the May 2023 petrol subsidy removal and the subsequent economic adjustments. The World Bank (2023b), in its June 2023 Nigeria Development Update, observed that the removal of the petrol subsidy was likely to exert substantial short-term pressure on households particularly those experiencing poverty and economic insecurity. It therefore emphasized the need for compensatory measures, including targeted cash transfer and stronger social protection programmes, to cushion the effects of rising petrol prices and prevent more households from falling into poverty.

The study is anchored in the Social Gospel Theory, which provides a theological basis for examining the Church's prophetic calling and moral responsibility towards society. In keeping with its documentary approach, the research does not involve questionnaires, interviews, direct observation, or field data collection. It also makes no use of statistical techniques. Instead, relevant published and institutional materials are examined critically and organised around key themes, including prophetic advocacy, Church-state relations, social justice, the protection of vulnerable groups, and the promotion of the common good. This approach enables the study to assess the Church's response to petrol price increases through theological reflection and existing documentary evidence.

Study database

The study draws on relevant national and international databases to retrieve scholarly publications, theological writings, doctrinal studies, and policy documents relating to Christian churches in Nigeria and their prophetic response to rising petrol prices. The databases consulted include ATLA Religion Database, JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar, African Journals Online (AJOL), EBSCOhost, Africa-Wide Information, and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ). These platforms provide access to academic materials on theology, social justice, religious engagement, and economic policy.

In addition, the study examines relevant statements, publications, and reports from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN).In particular, it considers the CBCN's February 2024 communiqué, *Journeying Together for the Common Good in the Church and Our Nation,* which acknowledges the debilitating effects of fuel subsidy removal on Nigerians and highlights the worsening conditions of poverty, hunger and economic hardship (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria {CBCN}, 2024) Furthermore, the study draws on economic reports and policy documents published by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other relevant Nigerian

government institutions. Together, these sources provide the documentary evidence needed to assess the Church's advocacy and the socio-economic implications of rising petrol prices in Nigeria.

Search dates: The literature search was conducted from 1 September to 3 November 2026. The search covered relevant scholarly and documentary publications without imposing a restrictive publication-date limit on foundational theologically, historical and conceptual works. However, for materials specifically addressing the petrol-price surges and its socio-economic consequences in Nigeria, the documentary review was restricted to the period from 29 May 2023 to 3 November 2026, following the removal of the petrol subsidy. This distinction allowed the study to incorporate foundational contributions, including Rauschenbusch (1917), Bosch (2011) and Akintola (2021), alongside recent literature, church statements, government publications, and institutional reports relevant to the Nigerian petrol-price crisis.

Search terms: The keyword combinations used in the search were: "petrol price hikes in Nigeria", "Christian churches", "prophetic appeal and activism", "Social Gospel", and "economic hardship". The Boolean operators AND and OR were used to narrow or broaden the searches.

Selection criteria: The materials included were peer-reviewed books, journal articles, conference proceedings, book chapters, theological publications, official church statements, government documents, and credible institutional reports relevant to the Nigerian context. Priority was given to sources addressing Christian social responsibility, prophetic advocacy, social justice, economic reforms and the socio-economic implications of rising petrol prices in Nigeria. Publications without identifiable authorship, adequate bibliographic documentation or demonstrable relevance to the study's objectives were excluded; The search retrieved 68 documents, of which they were all screened, after the removal of 13 duplicates or not related. Following assessments of their relevance, credibility and documentary adequacy, 53 documents were subjected to qualitative thematic analysis. Relevant textual information was identified, including: (a) the socio-economic consequences of rising petrol prices (b) poverty, household welfare and economic vulnerability; (c) Christian prophetic advocacy and public accountability; (d) church-based humanitarian interventions; (e) human dignity, social justice and the common good; and (f) the Church's institutional responsibility and engagement with government. These themes provided the analytical structure for examining the documentary evidence in relation to the study's objectives.

Literature review

Petrol price surges, economic hardship and social vulnerability in Nigeria

On 29 May 2023, the Federal Government announced the removal of the petrol subsidy, and thepump price of petrol rose sharply. This has further exacerbated Nigeria's socio-economic challenges, including high transport costs, rising food prices, inflation, and the declining purchasing power of households. These consequences have turned petrol pricing into a matter of social justice and institutional responsibility, requiring a balance between the human dignity of individuals and the goals of economic policy. Gamette and Oteng (2024) review the fuel subsidy removal experience in Ghana and Nigeria and conclude that poverty and welfare effects, environmental effects and the underlying political economy are interconnected aspects of subsidy reforms. Their study makes an important contribution in that it shifts attention from government expenditure to the consequences of reform for everyday life. Aniemeke (2024) examines the wide-ranging effects of petrol subsidy removal, highlighting its implications for household finances, the broader economy, society, and the environment. Similarly, Kanu and

Osuji (2024) explore the relationship between subsidy removal and inflation in Nigeria. They argue that increases in petrol prices contribute to rising costs across other sectors of the economy, thereby intensifying inflationary pressures. Extending this discussion, Ayenigba (2025) examines petrol price movements between 2014 and 2024 and draws attention to the connection between fuel price instability and inflation.

Social Gospel Theory and the Church's prophetic responsibility

The Social Gospel tradition offers a biblically grounded treatment of Christian involvement in thestruggleagainst economic injustice. The central belief of this tradition is that Christianity should be concerned not only with individual salvation but also with challenging unjust social structures that perpetuate poverty, exploitation and inequality. A leading thinker of the tradition, Rauschenbusch (1917), maintains that Christian ethics must challenge institutional and structural forms of sin. He criticises churches that limit their mission to the sphere of preaching, worship and individual morality.

Stauffer (2024), forhispart, advances the Radical Social Gospel as a framework for strengthening Christian social ethics by connecting theological convictions with everyday social realities and struggles. His position is relevant to Nigeria because it implies that prophetic advocacy should arise from the actual experiences of citizens living under the effects of economic policies. Equally, Sider (2015) concludes that Christian discipleship requires visible solidarity with poor and marginalised people, while Wright (2010) locates the mission of God's people within a broad commitment to justice, compassion and transformation.

Bosch (2011), in his discussion of evangelism and cultural engagement, emphasises that the Christian message should extend beyond preaching the gospel to embracing the Church's broader mission of addressing the spiritual, social and cultural needs of society. This counters the separation of evangelism from social action. Stott (2011), for his part, reinforces this argument by outlining the moral obligations of Christians in the face of human suffering. Volf (2011) asserts that Christians need to engage with society and contribute to the common good without losing their own religious identity. Taken together, these three authors suggest that the Church, in its prophetic role, must be morally critical, responsible and active.

TheProphetic mission of Christian Churches in Nigeria

The prophetic task of the Church includes denouncing injustice, questioning unjust policies, defending the downtrodden and demanding political accountability. Akintola's (2021) interpretation of Amos 5:21-24 highlights that the Church's prophetic responsibility must extend beyond religious ceremonies and traditions to confronting injustice, challenging oppression and standing up for the rights of poor and vulnerable Nigerians. His perspective is particularly relevant because it connects the ethical demands of biblical prophecy with the responsibility of the Nigerian Church to address contemporary social realities. From this standpoint, remaining silent in the face of economic hardship and recession undermines the Church's prophetic calling, diminishes the credibility of its Christian witness and weakens its relevance as an institution in society.

From the perspective of social responsibility, Okoye and Ugwu (2026), writing on the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), identify advocacy, education and community development as practical ways through which the Church can promote social justice and demonstrate its commitment to the welfare of society. Their research thus supports the view that the Church should take a moral stand on national issues. However, theirs is a general study of social justice thatdoesnot address the prophetic implications of petrol price hikes.

Similarly, Azubuike et al. (2024) argue that religious institutions in Nigeria possess considerable moral influence and the capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development. They maintain that these institutions have an important responsibility to address persistent social challenges, including poverty, inequality and other forms of societal injustice. However, they identify the limited involvement and initiative of religious leaders in promoting sustainable development as a major concern.

Exploring Nigeria's Pentecostal prosperity gospel, Smith (2021) identifies a contradiction between preachers' rhetoric against political corruption and the material excess displayed by some religious organisations. This raises a germane question about the credibility of churches that strongly condemn economic injustice in society but fail to uphold transparency, accountability, and fairness in their own financial and administrative practices. The Church's prophetic voice against oppression can only command respect when it is matched by integrity, responsible leadership and justice within its own institutions.

Responses from Churches to petrol price rises and institutional responsibility

Jegede and Akullah (2023), in their examination of how subsidy removal has affected Christian religious institutions in Nigeria, highlight its financial and operational consequences, particularly rising running costs, changes in church attendance and revenue, and the postponement or suspension of some church activities. Their findings are significant in two respects. First, they establish that economic policy reforms affect churches as well as households. Second, their contribution is more institutional than prophetic: it explains how the Church bears the financial burden of subsidy removal rather than offering insights into how churches should respond to its impact on society.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) exemplified the Church's prophetic engagement through its July 2023 statement "CAN calls for Well-Considered Policies to Ease the Current Hardship Faced by Nigerians." The statement challenged the government to pursue people-centred economic policies, provide affordable public transportation, address escalating fuel costs, strengthen domestic refining capacity and protect economically vulnerable citizens. This intervention demonstrates how the Church can exercise its prophetic mandate through constructive criticism, public accountability and advocacy for economic justice without degenerating into partisan political opposition. By holding public authorities accountable and amplifying the concerns of suffering citizens, the Church contributes meaningfully to the pursuit of humane economic policies and the common good

Catholic social teaching provides another valuable theological perspective for examining economic justice. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II (1991) links economic activity to human dignity and insists that it should serve the common good. Similarly, Benedict XVI (2009), in *Caritas in Veritate*, argues that economic decisions should be assessed not merely by their efficiency or profitability but also by their moral implications. Francis (2015), in *Laudato Si'*, further challenges economic practices that disregard the welfare of the poor and deepen social inequality. Although these papal encyclicals do not directly evaluate Nigerian government economic policies, they provide moral criteria for assessing such policies, particularly where such decisions place an excessive burden on vulnerable citizens.

The literature therefore highlights two interconnected aspects of the Church's responsibility: maintaining its institutional stability and upholding its prophetic duty to speak against social and economic injustice. Even though rising operational costs threaten the Church's financial sustainability, it must remain committed to its wider Christian responsibility to support and defend those whose livelihoods are affected by the same economic challenges.

Critical synthesis and identified literature gap

The literature indicates that rising petrol prices have far-reaching consequences beyond fiscal and tax policies, affecting poverty levels, food security, household living conditions, public transportation, and the financial sustainability of institutions. Gamette and Oteng (2024), Aniemeke (2024) and Orluchukwu and Lilly-Inia (2025) provide insightinto the socio-economic effects of subsidy withdrawal, while Jegede and Akullah (2023) discuss the implications for Christian institutions. Akintola (2021), Stauffer (2024), and Okoye and Ugwu (2026) provide a biblical and ecclesiological context for prophetic responsibility for social justice.

Notwithstanding these contributions, a critical research gap remains unaddressed. Most economic studies focus on the effects of subsidy withdrawal and related reform measures, while theological works have addressed social justice, poverty alleviation and propheticministry only in a broad sense. Jegede and Akullah's (2023) work on Christian institutions does not deal with sustained public advocacy. Similarly, CAN's 2023 intervention demonstrates public engagement but does not establish the extent, consistency or practical outcomes of denominational responses.

The study seeks to fill the gap by exploring the prophetic role of Christian churches in Nigeria in responding to the challenges of rising petrol prices between May 2023 and 2026. It investigates their public pronouncements, criticism of economic policies, defense of vulnerable citizens and practical responses to economic hardship. Its distinctive contribution is to evaluate prophetic advocacy through the Social Gospel framework, connecting biblical justice, constructive government engagement, institutional accountability and practical solidarity with economically disadvantaged Nigerians.

Findings

1. Petrol price surges have deepened socioeconomic inequalities

The documents reviewed show that petrol price surges have imposed additional transport costs, food price inflation and financial insecurity on households, with a disproportionate impact on low-income Nigerians. Aniemeke (2024) and Gamette and Oteng (2024) observe that subsidy reforms affect more than government expenditure, as they also have significant consequences for household welfare and living conditions.

2. Prophetic advocacy is an essential aspect of Christian mission

The findings indicate that the Church's prophetic responsibility extends beyond evangelism and discipleship to include speaking out against socio-economic policies and institutional practices that perpetuate injustice and deepen human suffering. Rauschenbusch (1917) identifies the challenge of structural injustice as a central concern of the Social Gospel, while Bosch (2011) emphasises the need for a holistic understanding of Christian mission. Consequently, when the Church remains silent in the face of economic hardship and social inequality, it risks undermining its prophetic calling and compromising its moral responsibility to society.

3. Christian advocacy has demonstrated a willingness to engage publicly with Nigeria's economic challenges, Although, such interventions have not always translated into sustained, coordinated interdenominational action.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), under Archbishop Daniel Okoh, expressed concern in July 2023 about the consequences of petrol price increases, particularly their effects on poverty, purchasing power and the living conditions of ordinary Nigerians (Christian Association of Nigeria(CAN), 2023) Similarly, the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church Nigeria, in its communiqué of 16 July 2023, acknowledged the removal of petroleum subsidies but urged the government to introduce practical measures to cushion the hardship experienced by

ordinary citizens (Methodist Church Nigeria, 2023). The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), through Primate Henry Ndukuba's address to its 14th General Synod on 13 September 2023, described the hardship resulting from subsidy removal called for more effective government measures to protect citizens' welfare (Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, 2023). Likewise, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria, in its September 2023 communiqué, identified subsidy as a factor aggravating poverty, hunger, transportation costs and the difficulties of meeting essential needs (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), 2023). These interventions demonstrate the readiness of Christian leaders to question economic policies and advocate measures that protect vulnerable citizens. Nevertheless, the largely separate character of these responses highlights the need for sustained interdenominational engagement, a more coordinated advocacy framework and a united Christian voice capable of exerting stronger influence on public policy.

4. Constructive criticism serves as a valid method of government engagement

The studyfinds that prophetic advocacy is more meaningful when it couples moral critique with concrete policy suggestions. CAN's 2023 intervention exemplifies this throughits calls for affordable transport, economic security and the protection of vulnerable communities. It shows that Christian advocacy can be non-partisan and constructive whileholding those in power accountable.

5. Christian institutions have not sufficiently translated advocacy into tangible economic help.

These findings reveal a gap between the Church's outspoken public pronouncements and its involvement in consistent humanitarian activities. Documentary evidence from 2023 to 2026 confirms Christian humanitarian intervention in food distribution, education, healthcare, and livelihood support (Caritas Nigeria, 2024; United Methodist Church in Nigeria, 2025, 2026). CAN, the United Methodist Church and Bible Society of Nigeria have similarly provided relief to vulnerable households and crisis-affected communities (TVC News, 2024; Bible Society of Nigeria, 2026) Nevertheless, the fragmented nature of these interventions exposes weaknesses in coordination, continuity and geographical coverage. Consistent with Sider (2015), churches must translate prophetic advocacy into sustained practical assistance through food relief, educational support, transport aid and targeted welfare programmes.

6. Social protection and the distribution of government relief are still urgent issues

The findings suggest that economic reforms implemented without adequate social protection measures place vulnerable households at greater risk of hardship. The World Bank (2024) similarly observes that social protection programmes can cushion the effects of subsidy removal. In this regard, Christian churches have a legitimate moral responsibility to urge the government to uphold transparency, ensure accountability and distribute relief measures fairly, particularly among those affected by the economic burden.

7. Institutional integrity determines the credibility of prophetic advocacy

For the Church to speak credibly and effectively against economic injustice, it must first demonstrate transparency, financial accountability and responsible stewardship in its own affairs. Volf (2011) emphasises that Christian engagement in public life should promote the common good and contribute meaningfully to society. Therefore, the Church's prophetic witness must be evident not only in its criticism of societal failures but also in the integrity of its own leadership, financial practices and institutional conduct.

8. Risinglivingcostshave constrained church ministries

Rising costs of transportation, electricity, food and other essential services have placed additional financial pressure on churches. Consequently, many congregations must contend with declining attendance, limited financial resources and the difficulty of sustaining their evangelistic activities and community development initiatives. Jegede and Akullah (2023) similarly observe that subsidy removal has significant financial implications for Christian organisations, affecting their capacity to fulfil their mission.

9. Christian advocacy requires evidence-based policy engagement

The study further shows that moral appeals are considerably more persuasive whensupported by reliable economic evidence, documented community needs and feasible policy options. Stott (2011) emphasises that genuine Christian commitment must extend beyond spiritual concerns to include active responses to the social challenges of contemporary society. Accordingly, churches should strengthen their advocacy efforts through evidence-based research, constructive policy dialogue, public enlightenment and meaningful collaboration with relevant professional organisations.

10. Social Gospel Theory offers a relevant model for turning prophetic advocacy into transformative social action

This study establishes that Social Gospel Theory provides a theological framework forsituating issues such as petrol price hikes within the concerns of economic justice, human dignity, social action and structural change. While Rauschenbusch (1917) points to the need to tackle structural injustice, Stauffer (2024) links Social Gospel practice to community organising. The significance of the theory lies in its capacity to guide the Church's transition from sporadic protest to institutionalised advocacy.

Conclusion

The increase in petrol prices in Nigeria since May 2023 has placed the Christian Church in a position where its prophetic calling and commitment to social responsibility are increasingly tested. In responding to the hardships experienced by citizens, the Church must move beyond spiritual pronouncements to address economic injustice, defend human dignity and promote the common good. From the perspective of Social Gospel Theory, this responsibility requires the Church to engage constructively with government, speak out against unjust economic conditions, advocate policies that promote social justice and demonstrate practical solidarity with individuals and communities affected by rising living costs. Although Christian organizations have expressed willingness to challenge unjust economic policies, their efforts require greater unity, stronger institutional commitment and more visible impact on the lives of ordinary people. Ultimately, the Church’s prophetic credibility should be measured not simply by its criticism of economic hardship but by its practical commitment to translating biblical principles of justice into meaningful civic action and social transformation. The Nigerian Church must therefore remain a courageous voice against injustice and actively contribute to societal change, ensuring that economic reforms do not deepen the poverty and vulnerability of already disadvantaged communities.

Recommendations

1. Christian churches, especially CAN and its member denominations, should establish permanent advocacy mechanisms to monitor economic policies, challenge harmful decisions, and defend people affected by petrol price hikes.

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2. Churches should independently commission socio-economic research and use economic evidence to support their public statements, policy submissions and demands for government accountability.
3. Christian leaders should engage relevant government authorities through sustained consultations, policy dialogue and written submissions urging the government to pursue fiscally responsible reforms that safeguard the lives of the most vulnerable Nigerians.
4. Churches should develop sustainable relief interventions, including food aid and educational, health and transport support, targeted at impoverished households.
5. Christian groups must demand transparent implementation, fair distribution and independent monitoring of government palliatives to prevent political manipulation and marginalisation.
6. CAN, CBCN, Pentecostal denominations, and other Christian groups should collaborate in joint advocacy initiatives that speak with one prophetic voice about economic justice and the common good.
7. Churches should promote accountability through transparent financial practices, prudent use of available resources and independent auditing. By upholding these standards, they can ensure that their internal financial practices reflect the same principles of fairness, integrity and economic justice they expect the government to uphold.
8. Seminaries, theological colleges and church leadership training programmes should include Christian social ethics, economic justice, prophetic engagement, and public accountability in their curricula.
9. Church action must centre on advocacy for poor households, small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs, rural communities and informal workers who are hardest hit by surging transport and production costs.

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