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## Democracy and Development Nexus: Assessing President Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda and Welfare of Nigerians, 2023-2025

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### Abstract

Nigeria's experiment with democracy has always carried both longing and tension, a nation reaching for development with one hand while steadyng its fragile democratic foundations with the other. This study revisits that delicate dance by examining President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's Renewed Hope Agenda (2023-2025) as a contemporary lens into the democracy-development nexus. Grounded in a mixed-methods design and inspired by a pragmatic research philosophy, the study weaves modernization theory, the democratic-advantage thesis, Rudebeck's vision of substantial democracy, and Dudley Seers' human-centered development standards into a single analytical tapestry. Using empirical indicators from national and international datasets, complemented by qualitative insights from policy actors, civil society voices, and lived experiences of citizens, the study reveals an unfolding narrative of reform, sacrifice, and fragile possibility. The early reforms, notably subsidy removal and exchange-rate liberalisation created economic turbulence and widespread distress. Yet beneath the hardship lie subtle signs of rebalancing, institutional correction, and cautious recovery. The findings show that while technical reforms may stabilise macroeconomic foundations, they do not automatically translate into tangible welfare gains. Development under democracy must be more than a policy agenda; it must be a lived assurance, a people-centred promise. The Renewed Hope Agenda therefore stands at a crossroads: its legitimacy will depend not on boldness alone, but on whether democratic governance can turn sacrifice into shared progress, and policy ambition into human wellbeing

**Keywords:** Democracy, development, renewed hope agenda, welfare outcomes, poverty, inflation

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## Introduction

Democracy in Nigeria has always been a long walk marked by hope, hesitation, and the stubborn resilience of a people who refuse to surrender their dream of a better nation. Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigeria has embraced the rituals and symbols of democratic life: elections held across seasons of uncertainty, constitutional promises reaffirmed, and civic voices struggling to be heard. Yet beneath these visible structures lies a quieter tension, a question that has lingered across administrations like a soft but persistent echo: *Has democracy truly improved the wellbeing of the Nigerian people?* The distance between our democratic aspiration and our developmental reality remains painfully wide.

It is against this backdrop that the Renewed Hope Agenda emerged in 2023, carried on the shoulders of a new administration that promised courage, reform, and a return to national possibility. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu stepped into office with a mandate to rebalance an economy long burdened by inefficiencies, leakages, and unsustainable subsidies. In swift and decisive strokes, fuel subsidies were removed, the exchange rate was harmonised, fiscal structures were recalibrated, and the government proclaimed a turning point in Nigeria's economic journey. These reforms sought to reset the nation's foundations, yet they also reshaped daily life for millions. The sudden rise in inflation, the deepening of poverty, and the expanding struggles of ordinary citizens revealed a sobering truth: reforms necessary for national survival may still cause profound social pain when not cushioned with democratic sensitivity.

This tension forms the heart of the problem this study confronts. Nigeria now stands at a fragile crossroads where the demands of economic restructuring collide with the expectations of democratic wellbeing. A democracy that cannot protect its people risks losing its moral authority, and reforms that do not translate into human flourishing may erode the very legitimacy needed to sustain them. The central concern, therefore, is not simply whether reforms were implemented, but whether they honour the democratic promise of shared progress, fairness, and inclusion. At its core, this study asks whether Nigeria's democratic governance is capable of turning sacrifice into hope, and hope into tangible development for its citizens.

Guided by this concern, the study seeks to examine how the Renewed Hope Agenda has shaped Nigeria's welfare indicators between 2023 and 2025. It pursues an understanding of

whether current reforms reflect democratic values of participation, transparency, accountability, and justice. In doing so, the study draws from the well-established debates on modernization, democratic advantage, and substantial democracy, while also grounding its inquiry in Nigeria's lived realities and the moral imperative of human-centred development championed by Dudley Seers. The object is not merely to measure the outcomes of policy actions, but to interpret how these outcomes speak to the quality of democracy itself. In this sense, the study's objectives become both analytical and moral: to assess the socioeconomic impact of reforms, to interrogate their democratic character, and to explore how citizens perceive the legitimacy and fairness of governance during this period of turbulence.

Arising from these objectives are the guiding questions that shape the inquiry, questions born from the desire to understand both the mechanics and meaning of democratic reform. They ask how the Renewed Hope Agenda has influenced poverty trends, employment conditions, inequality, and human-development indicators. They ask whether the reforms align with the principles of substantial democracy or whether they widen the gap between state action and citizen expectation. They also seek to know how Nigerians perceive these reforms, whether as necessary steps toward a better future or as burdens too heavy for democratic institutions to justify. These questions, though empirical, are deeply human, for they touch the lived experiences of citizens who carry the weight of national policy on their shoulders.

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the growing body of scholarship interrogating the democracy-development relationship within the African context, a relationship often distorted by elite capture, institutional weakness, and uneven distributions of opportunity. Second, it provides fresh empirical evidence on Nigeria's most recent phase of democratic governance, capturing a critical moment when difficult reforms intersect with fragile public trust. Third, it offers practical insights for policymakers, civil society actors, and governance practitioners who seek to understand how economic decisions resonate within the social fabric of a young democracy. Most importantly, the study echoes a timeless truth: development is not complete until it touches the lives of real people, restores dignity, and strengthens the covenant between state and society.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The relationship between democracy and development has long stirred intellectual curiosity across continents, yet in Africa, and especially in Nigeria, it carries a deeper emotional weight. It is not simply a scholarly debate; it is a lived struggle. It is the tension between what citizens hope for and what the state delivers, between the promise of elections and the reality of empty stomachs, between the poetry of democratic ideals and the prose of daily survival. This literature review walks through that contested history, weaving global theories with African experiences, and grounding them in Nigeria's unfolding journey under the Renewed Hope Agenda.

### Democracy and Development Nexus

The earliest attempts to explain the marriage between democracy and development emerged from classical modernization theorists such as Seymour Martin Lipset (1959). Lipset argued that economic development - rising incomes, literacy, industrial growth - creates social conditions that favour democratic stability. He saw development as the soil from which democracy naturally grows. For decades, this idea shaped policy prescriptions across the developing world.

Yet, as time passed, reality complicated theory. Many nations recorded economic progress without democratic deepening, while others sustained democracy in the midst of economic distress. The neat logic of modernization frayed. Przeworski and his colleagues (2000) offered a corrective: democracy does not *depend* on development to emerge, but development can help democracies survive. This "democratic advantage thesis" suggests that citizens in democracies enjoy better welfare outcomes because leaders are accountable, institutions restrain excesses, and public voice influences policy.

But even this thesis has met resistance, especially from African scholars who argue that democracy does not automatically generate development in contexts where institutions are weak, elites are predatory, and political culture is unevenly distributed (Azeez, 2004). The experience of countries such as Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Singapore, where economic leaps occurred under authoritarian rule further complicates the optimism of democratic advantage. Scholars like Chisadza and Bittencourt (2019) remind us that development pathways differ across regions and histories, and democracy alone cannot substitute for strategic governance, political stability, and policy coherence.

## African Perspectives: Democracy as Promise and Paradox

African political thought invites us into a more nuanced conversation. Scholars such as Chabal and Daloz (1999) argue that African states inherited fragmented governance systems that encourage disorder not by accident, but as an instrument of rule. Thus, democracy in Africa often lives in tension with a political culture shaped by patrimonialism, poverty, and uneven access to opportunity. Under these conditions, the presence of democratic structures does not guarantee democratic outcomes. Awad and Yussof (2016) contend that democracy in many African countries has not produced the improvements in human development anticipated by global theorists. Instead, the democratic experiment sometimes exposes institutional weakness and intensifies development challenges, especially where state capacity is thin and political competition is fierce. Their argument echoes a broader scholarly concern: democracy may open the door to participation, but it does not ensure accountability or equitable policy implementation.

Yet, African scholarship also carries hope. Rudebeck (2016) introduces the concept of “substantial democracy,” insisting that democracy must be judged not by elections or institutions alone but by its ability to empower citizens, reduce inequality, and enable meaningful participation in shaping public life. Substantial democracy demands that governance must touch the lives of people in ways they can feel, measure, and affirm. This perspective is crucial for evaluating the Renewed Hope Agenda because it shifts the focus from political form to human outcome. It invites the question: *If reforms do not reduce suffering, can they still be called democratic?*

## Nigeria’s Democracy-Development Puzzle

Nigeria’s democratic journey has inspired extensive scholarship, much of it critical, reflective, and deeply rooted in national experience. Akinola and Eze (2023) argue that Nigeria practices a procedural democracy - one that performs the rituals of elections without fully embracing the commitments of governance that improve citizens’ welfare. Omodia (2021) suggests that democratic practice in Nigeria often stagnates due to weak institutions, elite dominance, and poor policy implementation, leaving development aspirations unmet. Olu-Adeyemi (2023) further demonstrates that governance outcomes in Nigeria frequently diverge from popular expectations, creating a crisis of legitimacy where citizens support democracy in

theory but distrust its performance in practice. This gap between aspiration and delivery is central to the Nigerian democratic experience.

Azeez (2020) underscores the paradox of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, where he emphasized it as a paradox in which increased political participation has not led to improved welfare outcomes. In my later work with Oshewolo (2023), we highlighted how structural dependency and weak institutional capacity derail development efforts, even when democratic procedures appear intact. These observations point to a consistent theme: Nigeria's democracy suffers not from a lack of rules, but from a lack of substantive outcomes. The people vote, yet poverty deepens. They participate, yet inequality widens. They believe in democracy, yet democratic governance struggles to translate that belief into tangible improvement.

The Renewed Hope Agenda enters this historical conversation not as a new story but as the latest chapter in a long national search for democratic development.

### **Development as a Human Outcome: The Dudley Seers Lens**

Dudley Seers (1979) reframed development as a moral and human question rather than a technocratic one. For Seers in his Human-Centred Development thesis, a society cannot be called developed unless poverty, unemployment, and inequality are visibly declining. Development, therefore, is neither an abstraction nor a mathematical achievement; it is the lived wellbeing of people.

This frame is especially relevant for Nigeria today. Rising inflation, youth unemployment, reduced purchasing power, and widening regional disparities mean that any evaluation of the Renewed Hope Agenda must begin with one central concern: *Are people's lives improving?* Seers' criteria become the ethical compass of this study, reminding us that reform without relief is incomplete, and growth without inclusion is unstable.

### **The Political Economy of Reform: Balancing Pain and Legitimacy**

Reform literature, especially from Haggard and Kaufman (1995), reminds us that economic adjustments in democratic settings carry political consequences. Democracies require consent, and consent becomes fragile when reforms impose hardship. Fuel subsidy removal, exchange-rate unification, and fiscal tightening are classic neoliberal prescriptions, often recommended to

stabilise public finances. However, if implemented without adequate consultation or social cushioning, they risk undermining public trust, weakening legitimacy, and generating democratic fatigue.

Thus, evaluating the Renewed Hope Agenda requires an appreciation of both its economic logic and its political cost. The literature warns that reforms cannot succeed without social buy-in, participatory dialogue, and visible mitigation of hardship. In democracies, reform must “walk on two legs”: economic necessity and social legitimacy.

### **Emerging Scholarship: Citizen Perception, Trust, and Democratic Survival**

Recent governance studies emphasise the centrality of public trust in sustaining reforms. Afrobarometer (2024) reports an increasing tension in Nigeria: citizens support democracy yet worry about the direction of the country. This duality - faith and fear, hope and doubt - is characteristic of democracies managing economic crisis.

Trust becomes the invisible currency of reform. Without it, even well-intentioned policies face resistance. With it, citizens endure temporary pain in anticipation of future gain. Scholarship therefore urges governments to communicate reforms clearly, listen attentively, and design policies that do not deepen vulnerability.

This body of literature speaks directly to Nigeria’s moment, reminding us that democratic development is impossible when citizens feel unheard, unseen, or unprotected.

### **Research Methodology**

Understanding the democracy-development nexus requires a method attentive to both numbers and lived experience. Guided by a pragmatic philosophy, this study adopted a mixed-methods design, enabling the use of any evidence capable of illuminating the realities behind reform.

Quantitative data were drawn from authoritative sources including the National Bureau of Statistics, World Bank, UNDP, Afrobarometer, Mo Ibrahim Index, and Central Bank reports. These datasets captured trends in poverty, inflation, employment, inequality, human development, and governance.

Qualitative insights were gathered to give depth to the numbers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with policy experts, civil society leaders, labour representatives, selected public officials, and citizens from varied socio-economic backgrounds. Media debates, parliamentary discussions, and civic dialogues provided further context. Participants were purposefully selected to reflect Nigeria's governance ecosystem and to reveal how reforms are interpreted by those who live with their consequences.

The analysis combined trend interpretation, thematic coding, and triangulation to validate insights across data types. This approach ensured that the findings capture not only the statistical outcomes of reform but also the moral, emotional, and democratic meanings that citizens attach to them.

### Empirical Analysis

The Nigerian democratic landscape since 2023 has unfolded like a long and winding path, marked by hope, hesitation, and hard lessons. This study examined the extent to which the Renewed Hope Agenda has shaped welfare outcomes across employment, inflation, poverty trends, and public confidence in governance. The empirical findings draw from primary field surveys, structured interviews, and secondary datasets from the National Bureau of Statistics and international development reports.

Survey responses from citizens across Lagos, Abuja, Ibadan, Kano, and Port Harcourt revealed a mixed perception of democratic performance. A significant proportion of respondents believed that democracy still holds the promise of development, yet they lamented the slow pace of economic recovery. This aligns with national indicators showing that while some macroeconomic reforms have been initiated, the immediate welfare benefits remain unevenly distributed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

The removal of fuel subsidy in 2023 stands out as the most widely acknowledged policy shift under the administration. Respondents identified it as both a necessary correction and a painful disruption. This mirrors broader findings that subsidy removal, while fiscally strategic, has exacerbated short-term inflation and household strain (World Bank, 2024). Inflationary pressures

climbed through 2024, driven by energy costs, transportation expenses, and exchange rate adjustments, thereby eroding the purchasing power of low- and middle-income households.

Employment data showed a troubling pattern. Underemployment and informal sector expansion remained high, indicating that democratic reforms have not yet translated into significant labour market gains (International Labour Organization, 2024). This reinforces the long-standing argument that Nigeria's democracy has often struggled to convert political stability into productive economic outcomes, especially for youth.

Qualitative interviews with civil servants, small-scale traders, and community leaders revealed a persistent trust deficit. Many participants expressed the belief that democracy should offer not merely rhetoric but real opportunities: jobs, security, functioning infrastructure, and fair distribution of national resources. Yet some interviewees acknowledged early signs of institutional strengthening, particularly in the areas of tax reform, digital governance, and anti-corruption efforts.

Comparing these findings with the broader scholarship on governance and welfare, the evidence suggests that Nigeria's democratic journey remains burdened by structural inefficiencies. Studies by Ojo (2023) and Abubakar (2024) similarly argue that democratic consolidation in Nigeria has been overshadowed by weak institutions, elite dominance, and policy inconsistency. At the same time, development data indicates that targeted reforms, if sustained, can produce medium-term benefits, especially in fiscal stability and social sector investment (UNDP, 2024).

Taken together, the empirical indicators paint a portrait of democracy in transition, still young, still fragile, yet still capable of renewal when governance aligns with people-centred development.

## Discussion

The findings offer a window into the soul of Nigeria's democratic experience. They reveal a paradox familiar to our national story: a democracy that inspires hope yet struggles to deliver tangible welfare outcomes. The Renewed Hope Agenda was conceived as a pathway to correct

structural distortions and reposition Nigeria for inclusive growth. However, the journey has been marked by economic turbulence that tests the patience of citizens and the credibility of government.

Inflationary pressure and rising cost of living emerged as the most immediate concerns. This reflects the classical tension scholars describe between reform and welfare: structural adjustment often demands sacrifice before gains are realised (Rodrik, 2018). In Nigeria's case, the removal of subsidy and exchange rate reforms were economically rational yet socially disruptive, widening the gap between democratic expectations and lived realities. The empirical findings also affirm the theoretical position that democratic governance must be anchored in strong institutions to drive development (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019). Respondents' concerns about trust and transparency underscore the long-standing challenges of state capacity. Without institutional efficiency, even well-intentioned policies risk being swallowed by bureaucracy, mismanagement, or elite capture.

Yet the study also uncovers threads of possibility. The early signs of digital reforms, tax modernisation, and attempts at fiscal discipline point to a government trying to reorder the old foundations. These align with global evidence that governance reforms, when consistently implemented, can foster long-term welfare improvements (World Bank, 2024). The challenge is sustaining momentum and ensuring that the benefits trickle down in ways citizens can feel. The employment findings illustrate another gap: economic recovery without job creation leads to development without inclusion. This echoes Sachs (2015), who argues that development must move from macroeconomic abstraction to household transformation. Nigeria's youthful population requires not only political stability but economic pathways that encourage productivity, innovation, and dignified livelihoods.

The voices from the interviews bring the discourse home. Citizens do not merely desire democratic institutions; they long for democratic dividends. They want to feel the pulse of governance in their kitchens, workplaces, farms, and marketplaces. Their expectations affirm Amartya Sen's (1999) conception of development as freedom - the freedom to live well, work meaningfully, and aspire confidently. Ultimately, the findings suggest that Nigeria's democratic project stands at a crossroads. The Renewed Hope Agenda offers a framework, but its fulfilment depends on bridging the gap between policy and people, between reform and relief, and between democratic promise and democratic experience. If governance prioritises transparency, equity, and

institutional strengthening, democracy can indeed become the engine of national welfare. But if the old cycles persist i.e elite capture, weak institutions, inconsistent implementation, development will remain a distant promise.

Nigeria's democratic future therefore rests not only on government actions but on the collective resolve to nurture the fragile seed of governance into a harvest of shared prosperity. Democracy may not yet have delivered its full fruits, but the soil of possibility remains fertile when leadership is courageous, institutions are strengthened, and citizens are treated as the heart of the national project.

## Conclusion

The story of Nigeria's democracy is the story of a people who refuse to surrender their hope. What this study has revealed is a nation caught between the weight of its struggles and the promise of its possibilities. The empirical evidence shows that the Renewed Hope Agenda has set in motion reforms intended to stabilise the economy, strengthen institutions, and align governance with the aspirations of the citizenry. Yet the findings also make clear that the benefits of these reforms are not evenly felt. Inflation, unemployment, and a general rise in the cost of living continue to cast long shadows across households, testing public confidence in democratic governance.

Democracy, in its purest sense, draws its strength from the welfare of the people. When citizens are unable to meet basic needs, when jobs are scarce, and when opportunities seem limited to the privileged few, the democratic promise appears distant. The present administration has taken steps to correct deep structural distortions, but the transition has been painful for many. This reinforces the truth that development does not flourish in policy declarations alone. It flourishes when governance becomes both just and compassionate, when institutions act with integrity, and when leadership listens with humility.

The study also highlights the resilience of Nigerians. Across interviews and surveys, there emerged a quiet but steady belief that democracy can still work if it is rooted in fairness and guided by the moral responsibility of leaders. This echoes long-standing scholarship which affirms that

democratic consolidation cannot be achieved without citizen trust, institutional strength, and a governance culture that honours accountability.

What stands before Nigeria now is a narrow but real path toward renewal. If reforms are sustained with consistency, if the state deepens investments in human development, if transparency becomes a norm rather than an aspiration, and if opportunities are expanded for the youth who bear the weight of the nation's future, the dividends of democracy can begin to take firm shape. The Renewed Hope Agenda, though imperfect in execution, provides a foundation for long-term transformation. It will require patience from citizens and steadfastness from those who govern.

In the end, the fate of Nigeria's democratic journey rests not in the grandeur of policy documents, but in the everyday experiences of its people. Democracy becomes meaningful when a mother can feed her children without fear of tomorrow, when a young graduate can find dignified work, when communities feel secure, and when justice flows without favour. These are the markers of national welfare. These are the signs of a democracy that serves rather than survives.

Nigeria stands at a threshold. The path forward demands courage, wisdom, and an unwavering commitment to the common good. If these virtues guide the nation's steps, democracy can evolve from a contested promise into a lived reality, and the hope spoken from the podiums of power can find a home in the lives of ordinary citizens. This is the task before us. This is the future within reach.

## Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal both the strain and the possibility within Nigeria's democratic experience. In light of the objectives which focused on assessing welfare outcomes, institutional performance, policy impact, and citizen perceptions under the Renewed Hope Agenda, the following recommendations are offered to strengthen democratic governance and national development.

First, there is an urgent need for a deliberate programme that cushions the immediate welfare shocks caused by economic reforms. Inflation and rising living costs have placed heavy burdens

on households. Government must expand targeted social investment initiatives that reach vulnerable families, small businesses, farmers, and informal workers. Such interventions restore trust by showing that reforms are not sacrifices without support, but steps taken with people in view.

Second, employment creation must become the centrepiece of Nigeria's development strategy. The country cannot walk toward prosperity while a significant proportion of its youth remain underemployed. A coordinated approach that links education, vocational training, innovation hubs, and public works programmes will help create dignified pathways for young Nigerians. Job creation transforms democratic promise into lived opportunity.

Third, institutional strengthening must be pursued with unwavering commitment. Weak institutions have long stifled policy implementation. Government should invest in building transparent, accountable, and technologically equipped institutions that minimise leakages, reduce bureaucratic delays, and uphold ethical leadership. Strong institutions form the backbone of both democratic consolidation and sustainable development.

Fourth, the administration should deepen its communication strategy by engaging citizens in clear, honest, and consistent dialogue. Many Nigerians understand the need for reform, but they lose confidence when communication appears distant or vague. Transparent communication creates a bridge between policy and the people it is meant to serve, turning suspicion into partnership.

Fifth, fiscal reforms must continue, but with greater emphasis on fair and equitable resource distribution. Nigeria's historical pattern of centralised wealth has undermined local development. A more balanced fiscal arrangement that empowers states and local governments will promote grassroots growth, reduce regional disparities, and reinforce national unity.

Sixth, the government should prioritise stabilising the exchange rate and controlling inflation through well-coordinated monetary and fiscal policies. Economic stability is a foundation upon which all other welfare outcomes depend. When currency volatility eases and prices stabilise, households are better able to plan, work, and thrive.

Seventh, there is a need to strengthen anti-corruption frameworks and ensure their impartial enforcement. Citizens lose faith in democracy when corruption appears unchecked. A transparent, technology-driven, and independent anti-corruption mechanism will help rebuild confidence and free up resources for development.

Eight, democratic governance should embrace participatory decision-making. Citizens, civil society groups, faith leaders, youth movements, and professional bodies must be incorporated into policy design and monitoring. Participation gives democracy its pulse and helps policies reflect the experiences of those who will live with their consequences.

Finally, long-term investment in human development must become a national priority. Education, healthcare, housing, and social security are not charitable add-ons. They are the pillars of a prosperous society. Sustained funding for these sectors ensures that the Nigerian child, regardless of background, grows into a citizen who can contribute meaningfully to national progress.

These recommendations, grounded in evidence and aligned with the study objectives, offer a pathway toward a democracy that not only speaks the language of hope but delivers the substance of development. When governance honours the welfare of its people, democracy becomes more than a system; it becomes a shared journey toward a future where Nigerians can live with dignity, flourish in their labour, and trust the nation they call home.

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