

Weak institutions and infrastructure abandonment in Nigeria: A policy and governance Analysis

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Abstract

The development of infrastructure is broadly acknowledged as a crucial catalyst for macroeconomic growth, structural change, and social well-being. Nevertheless, in numerous African countries, the challenge extends beyond mere infrastructure shortfalls to include inadequate integration of research and evidence-based planning before, during, and after project implementation. This paper investigates the connection between weak institutional frameworks and the neglect of infrastructure in Nigeria, situating this issue within the broader discussions of governance, development policy, and the role of research in public infrastructure projects. The study utilized a qualitative policy analysis supported by secondary data obtained from government reports, oversight bodies, and development organizations. The paper examines the extent, trends, and fundamental causes of infrastructure abandonment across the key sectors of Nigerian economy. The results indicate that the neglect of infrastructure in Nigeria is a systemic problem that is intricately tied to institutional shortcomings, such as poor policy coordination, politicizing the selection of projects, inadequate utilization of research and feasibility studies, weak accountability mechanisms, and ineffective

monitoring and evaluation systems. The paper argues that the absence of rigorous research throughout the project cycle contributes significantly to poor project planning, implementation, and sustainability. Consequently, the study recommends an effective policy evaluation mechanism and a transparent, research-driven, independent feedback system for all public infrastructure projects in Nigeria.

Keywords: Project abandonment, policy evaluation, projects, public infrastructure

Introduction

Infrastructure serves as the foundation for macroeconomic development, influencing productivity, competitiveness, and the overall quality of life in nations. In both advanced and emerging economies, investments in transportation networks, energy systems, water supply, and digital connectivity have been empirically associated with sustained economic growth, structural transformation, and social inclusion (Calderón & Servén, 2010; World Bank, 2019). At the macro-development level, infrastructure promotes market integration, lowers transaction costs, improves human capital outcomes, and enhances state legitimacy through efficient service delivery. As a result, the governance of infrastructure—which includes its planning, financing, implementation, and maintenance—has become a focal point in contemporary development discussions because of

inadequate integration of research and evidence-based planning before, during, and after project implementation.

Globally, discussions surrounding infrastructure governance have evolved from merely expanding physical assets to addressing issues of institutional quality, sustainability, and lifecycle management. Researchers and policy organizations increasingly highlight that infrastructure deficits are not just a result of financing shortfalls but are fundamentally linked to weak institutions, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and governance failures (Flyvbjerg, 2014; OECD, 2020). The growing consensus emphasizes that without strong institutional frameworks, infrastructure investments are susceptible to inefficiencies, corruption, cost overruns, and, ultimately, abandonment. This trend is particularly pronounced in developing nations, where the contradiction of simultaneous infrastructure deficits and abandoned

projects has raised alarms regarding governance effectiveness and the extent to which evidence-based research informs infrastructure planning, implementation, and post-project evaluation.

Nigeria represents a significant case in the context of this global discussion. As the largest economy and most populous country in Africa, it grapples with a substantial infrastructure deficit estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of dollars (African Development Bank, 2018). However, beyond this shortfall, there exists a more concerning issue: the extensive abandonment of infrastructure projects across various sectors. From incomplete road networks and halted power initiatives to dysfunctional water systems and overlooked public buildings, the abandonment of infrastructure has become a systemic issue rather than an isolated occurrence. Reports from national oversight bodies reveal thousands of federal projects left abandoned across the country, signifying wasted public investments and missed opportunities for development (ICPC, 2021; BudgIT, 2022). This level of abandonment indicates not just a technical or financial challenge but a

significant governance crisis. It highlights weak institutional capabilities, poor policy coordination, politicization of project selection, and weak accountability frameworks. The persistence of abandonment of projects erodes public confidence, intensifies regional inequalities, and hampers Nigeria's long-term development initiative. Furthermore, it poses a challenge to development approaches that prioritise capital expenditure while paying insufficient attention to maintenance, continuity, institutional resilience, and the generation and utilisation of research evidence throughout the project lifecycle (Khoza, 2009).

According to Ugoani (2025), the Federal Government has around 4,000 unfinished or abandoned projects that will take 30 years to complete. The paper claims that the issue of abandonment has gone unchecked for far too long and is currently having a multiplier effect on the national economy and the building sector specifically (Ewa, 2013). Similarly, Ewepu (2024) identifies several factors contributing to project abandonment in Nigeria, including inadequate infrastructure, poor project preparation, the inability of project sponsors to secure

adequate funding, and other financial and administrative constraints. Beyond these immediate causes, many studies such as Owasa & Onimisi (2021), Onimisi (2014), and Onimisi & Osasona (2021) have identified broader institutional and governance-related factors responsible for project abandonment in Nigeria. These include policy inconsistencies, leadership egoism in project conceptualization rather than impact on citizens, funding, and a lack of planning.

Despite an increasing amount of literature on infrastructure deficits in developing economies, a significant theoretical and policy gap remains in understanding infrastructure abandonment as a manifestation of governance failure. Existing studies tend to focus on financing limitations, public-private partnerships, or project efficiency, overlooking the political economy dynamics and institutional deficiencies that result in project discontinuation. Moreover, policy frameworks in Nigeria have traditionally prioritized the initiation of new projects over the completion and maintenance of existing ones, indicating a disconnect between development planning and governance realities. Consequently, there is an urgent need to shift attention from the mere

provision of public infrastructure to the effective governance, sustainability, and long-term management of infrastructure assets. Such a shift requires the commitment of all relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, regulatory agencies, development practitioners, and local communities. The increasing cases of abandoned public infrastructure projects are generally pathetic, given the country's already severe infrastructure deficit, the uneven distribution of public facilities, the deterioration of existing infrastructure, and the inability of available facilities to meet the demands of a rapidly growing population (Delmon, 2017).

This study seeks to fill this gap by contextualizing infrastructure abandonment in Nigeria within the larger discussions on institutional weakness and governance failure. It employs a policy and governance perspective to analyze how institutional frameworks, political incentives, and regulatory structures contribute to the ongoing issue of abandonment of infrastructure projects. In doing so, the study enhances both theoretical discussions and policy reform by repositioning infrastructure abandonment as a fundamental

challenge in development governance rather than merely a secondary implementation concern. In order to address the decline in infrastructure in Nigeria, this study attempts to identify the main underlying causes of public infrastructural projects' abandonment in Nigeria.

Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative research framework that relies on the examination of secondary data. Relevant information is obtained from government publications, policy documents (National Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan (NIIMP), National Transport Policy, National Urban Development Policy, National Development Plan 2021–2025, and Managed by the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing), oversight agency reports, and international development organizations. Additionally, the study references existing academic literature concerning infrastructure governance, institutional theory, and public sector management. A content analysis method is applied to systematically investigate patterns of infrastructure neglect and institutional deficiencies. Furthermore, a theoretical literature review technique was employed to scrutinize policy frameworks, budget allocations, and

project implementation reports. Comparative insights are derived by placing Nigeria within the context of broader global discussions on infrastructure governance. The data are critically assessed to uncover recurring themes, trends, and governance deficiencies. This methodology facilitates a thorough understanding of the connection between weak institutions and infrastructure neglect in Nigeria.

Literature review of contextual issues

Public infrastructure

Infrastructure, in a broader context, refers to the fundamental conditions, facilities, and support systems essential for any productive process or achieving a standard level of human wellbeing. It serves as a critical driver of socio-economic development in any nation, whether it involves healthcare services, transportation network establishment, basic education provision, or energy consumption needs (Brima, 2020). Public infrastructure encompasses the collection of amenities and capital assets that cannot typically be funded through private investment alone. In this context, these include roads, bridges, airports, railways, energy distribution systems, and comparable public projects essential for

the effective operation of a contemporary economy (Brima, 2020). Given their substantial capital requirements and broad societal benefits, many of these facilities are often beyond the capacity or incentive structure of private investors to provide adequately on their own.

It includes essential sectors such as transportation, energy, water supply, sanitation, and telecommunications, which serve as fundamental enablers of productivity, market integration, and human development. From an economic standpoint, public infrastructure is often regarded as a type of public capital that produces positive externalities and supports long-term growth (Aschauer, 1989; Calderón & Servén, 2010). Scholars focusing on institutional and governance aspects further assert that the meaning of infrastructure extends beyond physical assets to encompass socio-technical systems integrated within regulatory frameworks, policy processes, and maintenance regimes (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2019). This broader perspective underscores the significance of lifecycle management, which encompasses planning, financing, implementation, and maintenance, in influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of infrastructure. Thus, public infrastructure

is most accurately perceived as both a material and institutional construct, whose performance depends on the quality of governance structures and the efficiency of public sector management. Public infrastructure specifically refers to infrastructure that is owned, financed, regulated, or managed by government authorities for public use and benefit (Manjo, 2024). It encompasses the infrastructure and systems that support the economy's daily operations to raise the general public's standard of living. In terms of policy, purpose, finance, management, and ownership, public and private infrastructure are very different. Drainage, water treatment systems, water dams, and reticulation pipes, roads, bridges, parking ramps, schools, research centres, skyways, railroads, traffic signal lights, pipelines, and so on are examples of publicly owned physical infrastructure that are necessary for maintaining human life (Manjo, 2020).

Policy evaluation

Policy evaluation criteria are crucial for evaluating public policies. These criteria assist policymakers and evaluators in determining the effectiveness of an intervention, such as infrastructure. This policy evaluation criterion includes well-recognized and used general evaluation

criteria—relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability—that have long been employed by the evaluation community. Van Hulst et al. (2025) see this as the objective, systematic, and empirical analysis of the impacts that current policies and public programs have on their intended targets, specifically regarding the goals they aim to accomplish. However, significant policy changes are not always the outcome of policy evaluation. In other words, although the idea of evaluation implies that an implicit "feedback loop" is a fundamental component of the policy cycle, this loop may not always be operationalized or may only lead to minor adjustments to the status quo (Wollmann, 2017). Consequently, policy evaluation is fundamentally regarded as a systematic and objective analysis of the design, execution, and results of public policies, to assess their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

It is grounded in both positivist and interpretive frameworks, merging empirical measurement with normative evaluation to guide decision-making and enhance policy learning. Researchers like Vedung (2017) characterize policy

evaluation as a thorough retrospective analysis of the value and significance of government interventions, whereas Weiss (1998) highlights its importance in producing evidence that enhances policy processes and outcomes. From an institutional viewpoint, policy evaluation acts as a feedback mechanism within the policy cycle, connecting formulation, implementation, and reform by pinpointing gaps and unintended consequences (Dunn, 2018). Policy evaluation is an organized and objective examination of a current or completed policy or reform endeavour, its design, implementation, and results, with a goal of assessing the policy's value or significance or relevance, achievement, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability.

Policy evaluation is essential for comprehending and addressing infrastructure abandonment, especially in environments marked by weak institutional capacity. A thorough policy evaluation offers a structured approach to evaluate the design, execution, and results of public projects, thus pinpointing deficiencies that could result in discontinuation or abandonment. In Nigeria, the poor incorporation of both ex-ante and ex-post evaluation methods

has led to inadequate project selection, ineffective monitoring, and a lack of feedback mechanisms vital for policy learning (Vedung, 2017; OECD, 2020). Consequently, infrastructure initiatives are frequently launched without comprehensive needs assessments, cost-benefit analyses, or sustainability strategies, heightening the risk of abandonment. Moreover, the weak enforcement of evaluation results diminishes accountability, permitting politically driven projects to continue despite evident inefficiencies. Therefore, the lack of strong policy evaluation frameworks not only obscures the reasons behind infrastructure abandonment but also reinforces it as a persistent governance issue.

The relationship between public spending theory and project inefficiencies is fundamentally rooted in the political economy of resource allocation and institutional incentives. Public spending theory, especially as expressed in the writings of Wagner (1893) and further refined through public choice theories, indicates that decisions regarding government expenditures are frequently swayed by political factors rather than the pursuit of efficiency maximization. In the Nigerian context, this is evident in

the cost overruns, project duplication, and the prioritization of new capital projects over the completion and maintenance of existing ones (Tanzi & Davoodi, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 2014). These inefficiencies are intensified by information asymmetry, rent-seeking activities, and inadequate fiscal discipline, resulting in a less-than-optimal allocation of public resources. As a result, extensive public investments do not effectively translate into functional and sustainable infrastructure, thereby perpetuating cycles of abandonment and resource wastage. By connecting public spending theory to the identified project inefficiencies, the analysis underscores how structural and institutional distortions within budgeting and expenditure processes significantly contribute to the challenges of infrastructure governance.

Public Expenditure Theory

Ensuring the seamless operation of economic operations is a responsibility of the public sector. However, the government engages with a wide range of stakeholders and pursues multiple policy objectives. Therefore, the driving principles for public spending should be justice and efficiency (Wollmann, 2017). In order to provide services to

stakeholders, the government must maintain a sound balance between revenue generation and public expenditure. Conversely, equity refers to the distribution of public benefits among interested parties. Wagner's law of increasing public expenditure provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding public spending patterns. Developed by Adolph Wagner (1835–1917), the law posits that as an economy grows and national income rises, government expenditure tends to increase at a proportionately faster rate (Brima, 2020). As a result, infrastructure spending and economic growth have a proportionate relationship (Brima, 2020).

Public Expenditure Theory offers a vital analytical framework for comprehending the factors contributing to infrastructure abandonment in Nigeria, especially in light of fragile institutional structures. This theory suggests that government expenditure decisions are influenced not only by developmental priorities but also by political motivations, bureaucratic interests, and institutional limitations (Wagner, 1893; Musgrave, 1959). Extensions of public choice theory further emphasize how rent-seeking activities, fiscal irresponsibility, and inadequate accountability frameworks skew

expenditure priorities, resulting in cost overruns, project duplication, and ineffective execution (Tanzi & Davoodi, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 2014). As a result, infrastructure abandonment can be viewed as a consequence of misaligned incentives within public spending frameworks, where the lack of robust institutional safeguards permits inefficient resource allocation and poor project sustainability to persist. This highlights the necessity of aligning expenditure practices with the principles of efficiency, accountability, and long-term value to reduce infrastructure abandonment and enhance infrastructure governance.

Public infrastructure project in Nigeria: An analysis

Public infrastructure initiatives in Nigeria demonstrate a complicated relationship between ambitious investment strategies and ongoing structural inefficiencies. Recent statistics show that Nigeria's infrastructure stock hovers around 30–35% of GDP, which is significantly lower than the global standard of 70% necessary for sustained economic transformation. To bridge this gap, the government has ramped up capital expenditure and policy reforms, including the National Integrated Infrastructure

Master Plan (2020–2043), designed to attract both public and private investment, especially through Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs). Sub-national governments have also stepped up their efforts, with at least 15 states collectively committing over ₦10.7 trillion to infrastructure development in the 2026 fiscal year.

Despite these initiatives, essential sectors such as power, transportation, and digital infrastructure continue to fall behind, facing challenges like low electricity generation (below 4GW for over 200 million people) and insufficient digital capacity, which hinder productivity and economic competitiveness. However, the effectiveness of public infrastructure projects in Nigeria is compromised by systemic governance and planning issues, beyond just the scale of investment. Empirical studies point to fragmented policy coordination, weak data-driven planning, and poor project execution as significant contributors to inefficiencies and subpar performance. Moreover, over 70% of Nigeria's road network is in poor condition, indicating not only insufficient funding but also a lack of maintenance culture and lifecycle management. The persistence of these challenges, coupled with a projected infrastructure deficit of

up to \$2.3 trillion by 2043, highlights a significant disparity between policy aspirations and implementation capabilities.

According to the World Bank (2004), the state of Nigeria's infrastructure in terms of quality and quantity lags significantly behind that of many other countries, while the high rate of infrastructure abandonment continues to give Nigeria a negative image. Out of 102 countries assessed by the Global Competitiveness Report in 2004, Nigeria was ranked 3rd to the last in terms of quality of infrastructure, which apparently confirmed World Bank (2002) findings on public infrastructure projects in the country as severely grossly inferior. Using the World Bank survey report, a number of public infrastructures were listed as lacking generally across the states in Nigeria. One of the most pressing challenges is the inadequate provision of safe and potable water. The report shows that about 44 per cent of households rely on their own private boreholes, while over 50% of the city dwellers lack access to adequate potable water. Consequently, a substantial proportion of households depend on unsafe and unhygienic water sources (Hall, 2006). The state of road infrastructure, an important structural

facility in the 21st century, is grossly inadequate in Nigeria. A good road network facilitates the movement of people, as well as goods and services, across the various segments of society. According to Abdulkareem and Adeoti (2004) and Mayaki (2014), a good road network provides for pedestrian facilities such as walkways, bus stops, and a carriage way, culverts, drainage systems, street lighting, bridges and flyovers, traffic lights, speed breakers, traffic signs, and layby. However, many of these features remain inadequate or poorly maintained in several parts of Nigeria.

The Global Competitiveness Report shows that the Nigerian roads have the lowest density in Africa, and Nigeria's quality of public infrastructure projects was ranked 3rd to the last. The transportation system, which is a component of the overall infrastructure project in the country that needs the road network and takes responsibility for bridging the gap in the chain of production and consumption, remains in a deplorable state as a result of the continuous unavailability of infrastructure projects.

In terms of waste management, especially solid waste, which Nigeria generates about 80,000 metric tons daily, with only

about 30% of this being collected for proper disposal, there remain other challenges facing us (Alabi & Ocholi, 2010). This attitude has created an unsavoury cultural habit, which has led to indiscriminate disposal of solid wastes in any available open spaces across the federation, both in the streets and open drains. To some extent, the blockage of drains and the natural drainage routes has led to flooding in Nigerian cities. With an installation capacity of 4200 MW, the maximum available capacity is still limited to 3300 MW. The country is far behind in power generation and supply. Furthermore, transmission losses are estimated at between 30 and 35 per cent, while electricity access remains limited, with only about 10 per cent of rural households and approximately 40 per cent of the total population having access to a reliable electricity supply (Alabi & Ocholi, 2010; Ewepu, 2024).

Public infrastructure initiatives in Nigeria illustrate the nation's aspirations for development alongside ongoing governance issues. Recently, the federal government has persistently raised capital spending on infrastructure, with the budget cycles for 2024–2026 designating trillions of naira for areas

such as transportation, energy, housing, and water resources (Budget Office of the Federation, 2024; World Bank, 2023). Notable flagship projects include the Lagos–Calabar Coastal Highway, rail modernization efforts, and reforms in the energy sector aimed at enhancing power generation and transmission capability. These investments highlight the critical role of infrastructure in fostering economic growth, regional integration, and industrialization. Nevertheless, despite increasing fiscal commitments, the outcomes of project delivery remain variable, frequently marked by delays, budget overruns, and incomplete implementation, reflecting more profound structural and institutional challenges within the public sector.

Simultaneously, Nigeria's infrastructure environment is characterized by a notable prevalence of stalled and abandoned projects, indicating systemic inefficiencies in governance and policy implementation. Reports from oversight organizations such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) disclose that there are over 4,000 abandoned federal projects nationwide, with estimated completion costs surpassing ₦7.78

trillion (ICPC, 2021). Additional evaluations by civic groups like BudgIT (2022) and Tracka reveal that numerous projects remain unexecuted each year despite budgetary provisions, underscoring deficiencies in implementation and accountability. In sector-specific terms, agencies such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) have recorded thousands of incomplete projects, further demonstrating the magnitude of the issue (NDDC, 2020). These patterns imply that Nigeria's infrastructure dilemma is not merely a matter of funding shortages but rather a reflection of weak institutional coordination, inadequate project continuity, and insufficient monitoring systems, thereby reinforcing the overarching narrative of infrastructure neglect as a governance crisis.

A significant proportion of Nigeria's road network deteriorates rapidly due to lack of proper drainage facilities, which are essential for protecting road surfaces from erosion, flooding, and other forms of water-related damage. A proper drainage system facilitates the effective control and removal of surface water along road corridors, thereby enhancing road durability and safety. However, many

drainage channels are either poorly constructed, blocked, or clogged with silt and waste materials, reducing their effectiveness and increasing the vulnerability of roads to deterioration, particularly during the rainy season (Olorunfemi, 2021). In the same vein, Morakinyo et al. (2012) stated that adequate drainage provision or a channel will assist in the gradual and constant removal of water from an area through artificial or natural means. The availability of drainage infrastructure, such as land drainage, ensures an open and readily available channel for the effective flow of water. Conversely, the absence of a drainage system in Nigerian roads leads to many potholes, slowness in vehicle movement, and accidents, especially in the rainy season.

Abandoned public infrastructure projects require accurate and realistic evaluation to minimize inefficiency and wastage of resources, continuous incomplete projects, and total or partial implementation of project goals.

Causes of the abandoned public infrastructure project in Nigeria

Lack of research-driven projects: A significant factor contributing to the abandonment of public infrastructure

projects in Nigeria is the lack of rigorous research and evidence-based planning before the commencement of these projects. Numerous projects are initiated without proper feasibility studies, needs assessments, or analyses of environmental and socio-economic impacts. This oversight leads to inadequate project design, unrealistic cost projections, and a disconnect from the genuine needs of the community. Furthermore, the lack of dependable data and research inputs undermines the decision-making and prioritization processes. As a result, projects face unexpected challenges during their execution, which ultimately lead to delays and project abandonment. Thus, enhancing research capabilities and incorporating data-driven planning is essential for minimizing project failures.

Poor selection of project and planning:

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Public Investment Management Assessment (PIMA) framework, which assessed whether countries or states have a project evaluation and accountability appraisal system that ensures major public infrastructure project proposals are subjected to rigorous review, risk assessment, and systematic selection based on clearly defined and publicly

available criteria (IMF, 2018). Findings from the framework indicate that many low-income developing countries perform poorly in project appraisal and selection processes, thereby increasing the likelihood of inefficient investments and project abandonment.

In Nigeria, the poor selection process of public infrastructure projects results in wasteful white elephant projects with limited social and economic value. This challenge has persisted for decades, as evidenced by numerous underutilized or abandoned public infrastructure projects, including some housing estate developments across various states of the federation. Furthermore, Nzekwe (2015) identified inadequate planning as a contributing factor to Nigeria's high rate of infrastructure project failures. They reaffirmed the importance of effectively integrating project objectives, stakeholder needs, and implementation requirements into the planning and design phases of any public infrastructure project in order to ensure successful implementation. Poor planning techniques increase the likelihood of project failure or abandonment. This position is supported by Dosumu and Aigbavboa (2017), who identified planning-related factors like time and cost estimation as the cause of

Nigeria's widespread infrastructure project failures.

Poor funding and management: The apparent increase in the number of abandoned public infrastructure projects could be attributed to a lack of funds and weak project management practices. One of the persistent challenges facing the achievement of public infrastructure development goals is the insufficient and inconsistent provision of financial resources for project execution. Poor project management has repeatedly led to a completed facility that did not meet the required and functionality standards. (Vedung, 2017). The majority of Nigeria's infrastructure projects have failed as a result of inadequate resource allocation and project management. Infrastructure development involves the coordinated deployment of financial, human, technical, and organizational resources to achieve specified project objectives (Nweze, 2016). Since all unused funds must be returned to the government at the end of each fiscal year, Nigerian government levels have not evaluated the infrastructure projects for which budgeted funds are being returned in order to identify the incompetence of government agencies in terms of time

wasted on procurement, which results in delays and project failure.

Inflation: Inflation and other unanticipated circumstances may sometimes make project cost variations inevitable, but inadequate planning and design have also made it difficult to determine accurate material and project cost estimates. Corrupt public servants and contractors have persisted in taking advantage of this weakness, causing cost deviations that ultimately result in project costs that are several times higher and, frequently, lead to project failure (Aschauer, 1989). Aside from variations resulting from inadequate scope descriptions and documentation, another reason why infrastructure projects in Nigeria fail is that financial institutions that are involved in providing funding to contractors are reluctant to make such funds available early. They usually do that halfway through the project, out of concern that the project might not be carried out as planned, which would cause the project to stall (Vedung, 2017).

Policy issue: Inconsistency in government policies has also been mentioned by numerous scholars as one of the main reasons why infrastructure projects in Nigeria fail. In this context, policy

inconsistency primarily refers to frequent leadership changes, which result in the termination of ongoing programmes and initiatives and the adoption of self-conceptualized projects (Efenudu, 2010). Although this practice was more prevalent during the military era, democratic governments have continued to exhibit this anti-developmental tendency, thereby undermining Nigeria's economic and infrastructure development. Poor timing and inadequate planning are the main obstacles to infrastructure projects in Nigeria. According to Westerveld (2003), any project that lacks proper planning would inevitably fail. The project team can create goals and determine the most effective means of reaching them with the aid of project planning. In Nigeria, parties involved in the implementation of infrastructure projects frequently hire unskilled specialists for project planning and develop poor project plans before implementation begins, which can have disastrous effects on the project. Even when competent individuals are available to prepare the project plan, time constraints arising from various circumstances make it challenging for planning officials to adhere to established protocols and produce an implementable

plan that would ensure the project's success (Vedung, 2017).

Bureaucracy and corruption: Since government organizations are frequently tasked with initiating and overseeing ongoing projects, some officials take advantage of this power to manipulate the process by working with contractors to fabricate progress reports and alter cost estimates for personal gain, thereby contributing to the failure of the majority of infrastructure projects (Nweze, 2016). The consequences of excessive bureaucracy and corruption include project delays and cost overruns. For example, contractors frequently fabricate timesheets, use subpar or lower-quality materials, and occasionally deliberately disregard project specifications to secure illegitimate financial benefits. This may also intentionally inflate project duration and cost estimates to maximize financial gains (Sohail & Cavil, 2009). Corruption plays such a significant role in project failure in Nigeria that contractors may obtain confidential bidding information from the client's quantity surveyor to ensure the submission of the lowest competitive bid and increase their chances of winning the **contract**(Odeyinka & Yusuf, 1997). Furthermore, ineffective leadership and

corruption continue to exacerbate the challenges faced by public infrastructure projects in the country. Practices such as corruption, misappropriation of funds, favouritism, and ethnic bias in contracting, among other sectarian issues, have hindered the country from reaching its full potential in various public infrastructure initiatives. Moreover, the interplay between politics and corruption during the planning and execution of infrastructure projects has led to numerous designated projects remaining neglected (Manjo, 2024).

Political influence and instability:

Sociopolitical problems such as political interference, land disputes, and community opposition have a significant impact on project abandonment. Community opposition frequently results from inadequate consultation with affected stakeholders or from perceptions of the project's negative consequences for the local populace. Project delays can also result from political unrest and governmental transitions, as new administrations may revise or revoke previously authorized plans. The fundamental reason for this pattern is that contracts are typically awarded to friends and supporters of the ruling party, with such contracts often serving

political interests. Numerous instances exist where infrastructure contracts are inflated, leading new governments to prefer starting their own projects and accepting kickbacks rather than providing funding for ongoing projects (Nwachukwu et al., 2010; Ake et al., 2023; Owioye et al., 2025). The tendency of project failure and abandonment is often increased when these sociopolitical factors are combined with management and economic constraints (Obakin et al., 2024). Similarly, Nweze (2016) highlights that socio-cultural and political interferences, along with poor leadership and corruption, have been identified as factors contributing to the failure of various public infrastructure initiatives in Nigeria. These socio-cultural challenges often manifest as communal or tribal disputes, while political interference is seen when current leaders refuse to allocate funds for public infrastructure projects that were initiated by their predecessors without valid reasons (Manjo, 2024; Owioye et al., 2025; Nweke-Love, et. al 2025; Iseolorunkanmi et al., 2023). One of the prolonged reasons that often leads to the failure of infrastructure projects is political instability and community interference, which stems from the inconsistency in

government policies. Historical evidence indicates that succeeding administrations in Nigeria frequently abandon infrastructure initiatives launched by their predecessors (Manjo, 2024).

The need for evaluation and accountability

The necessity for effective policy evaluation and accountability within Nigeria's infrastructure sector is highlighted by the ongoing trend of project abandonment and ineffective public investment results. Policy evaluation acts as a vital tool for examining the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of infrastructure projects throughout their entire lifecycle—from inception to completion and maintenance. In Nigeria, inadequate or inconsistent evaluation frameworks have led to poor project selection, insufficient cost-benefit analysis, and limited oversight of implementation processes (OECD, 2020; World Bank, 2023). In the absence of thorough ex-ante and ex-post evaluation mechanisms, projects are frequently initiated based on political motives rather than developmental needs, which heightens the risk of discontinuation and abandonment. Enhancing evaluation systems would facilitate evidence-based

decision-making, optimize resource allocation, and ensure that infrastructure investments are in line with national development objectives.

Equally significant is the role of accountability in tackling governance failures linked to infrastructure abandonment. Accountability mechanisms—such as legislative oversight, audit institutions, and anti-corruption agencies—are crucial for guaranteeing transparency in public expenditure and enforcing responsibility among policymakers and implementing agencies. Nevertheless, in Nigeria, weak institutional enforcement and limited repercussions for project non-completion have permitted the persistence of inefficiencies, cost overruns, and project abandonment (ICPC, 2021; BudgIT, 2022). Improving accountability necessitates not only stronger regulatory frameworks but also enhanced transparency in budget execution, citizen engagement, and the application of digital tracking tools for public projects. By combining thorough evaluation with enforceable accountability structures, Nigeria can significantly mitigate infrastructure abandonment and foster a more efficient, credible, and results-driven public sector.

What is the need for evaluation and accountability? There is a need for evaluation and accountability because an effective project appraisal not only supports informed decision-making processes and project optimization, but also facilitate the selection of future projects that can produce the highest social and economic impact on the citizens. Evaluation and accountability of public infrastructure projects have vital roles in the aspect of infrastructure governance since they serve as gatekeepers, guaranteeing the basic principle that socially and economically feasible projects get to the implementation stage (Rajaram et al, 2014). Public infrastructure project evaluation and accountability are essential for the success of any project and for preventing the abandonment of public infrastructure projects. They help in analyzing the effectiveness of the project and identifying areas for improvement in the future. Many public infrastructure projects fail due to a lack of evaluations and accountability. Furthermore, the importance of public infrastructure project evaluation and accountability in the face of increased abandoned projects can be seen in their benefits. These benefits include:

Provision of valuable insights: Public infrastructure project evaluation and accountability provide valuable insights into the existing project and help in identifying the gaps that may have occurred during the project that led to it being abandoned. Through this process, an opportunity is provided to analyze the public infrastructure project and determine what actually went wrong and what could have been done better.

It helps in identifying issues in real-time: Public infrastructure evaluation and accountability are conducted during the project execution, with a focus on identifying and addressing concerns or issues in real-time. Through evaluation and accountability, problems and risks that may lead to abandoned public projects are identified in real-time. Evaluation and accountability of public infrastructure help in identifying any corrective actions that need urgent measures to achieve success.

It improves public project execution: Public infrastructure project evaluation and accountability help identify areas for improvement, both in existing and ongoing public projects. Through evaluation and accountability, changes can be implemented in order to ensure

improved project execution. In order to prevent abandonment of public infrastructure projects and to increase the success rate, evaluation and accountability help identify the challenges and gaps associated with the project's success.

It reduces project risks: Public infrastructure project evaluation and accountability help identify the potential risks that are inherent in public infrastructure projects by taking into consideration the budgetary provision, timeline, and quality. By identifying these potential project risks involved in public infrastructure projects in the state, the rate of project abandonment can be literally reduced.

Policy evaluation mechanism for appraisal of infrastructure projects in Nigeria

Cost-benefit analysis: To reduce the cases of abandoned public infrastructure projects in Nigeria, this technique should be used to compare the total costs of a public infrastructure project with its total benefits inherent in each. This technique, when used to appraise public infrastructure projects, provides the net cost or benefit associated with every

project (Taliercio & Estrada, 2020). The likelihood of project abandonment can be significantly reduced if the alternatives or available options are appraised as well as compared to select the best, while the one that yields the most benefits relative to the costs (Kaplan, 2014). This technique is imperative because it allows the use of the welfare economics approach, which provides a clear and well-thought-out framework for assessing the "social" (or economic) value of public infrastructure projects.

Cost-effectiveness analysis: This type of evaluation presents an alternative to the cost-benefit analysis, where the comparison of the relative costs of two or more projects is carried out with their related outcomes. The cost-effectiveness analysis is often used when it is difficult or impossible to carry out a cost-benefit analysis, in cases where quantifying the benefits is difficult or when outputs are standardized, as it provides a simpler cost-effectiveness analysis (Kaplan, 2014)

Multicriteria analysis: To reduce the incidence of abandoned public infrastructure projects in Nigeria, this technique is essential as it involves scoring, grading, and weighting public projects based on multiple evaluation

criteria to determine the most impactful and important projects. This approach is often used when quantification of benefits and costs is not pursued. The multicriteria analysis allows for aggregation of criteria with the aid of a qualitative or quantitative method by relying on the decision maker's discretion.

Simplified methodologies: Another method of evaluation is the simplified methodologies, which focus on the evaluation of completed public infrastructure projects using techniques that are simpler in scope. These include a simplified template for cost-effectiveness analysis or cost or simplified multicriteria analysis using a scale weight with a basic rating. This approach can be adopted when the more rigorous methods are infeasible or too costly.

Conclusion and recommendations

The paper concludes that well-planned and research-driven public infrastructure projects can reduce cases of project abandonment in Nigeria. The establishment and publication of transparent public infrastructure project selection criteria, supported by well-defined evaluation and approval procedures, are essential for the country's overall developmental progress. Also,

undue political influence in public infrastructure projects should be minimized by subjecting all proposed projects to rigorous technical, economic, and social analyses conducted through transparent procedures and independently evaluated before their inclusion in the national budget. The paper recommends the following measures:

- Nigeria should strengthen stakeholder participation by involving stakeholders such as the private sector, research consultants, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations in the planning, evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of public infrastructure projects. Including stakeholders in public infrastructure project evaluation allows strategic feedback on the project's performance. Private sector participation in public infrastructure development is necessary because it will reduce budget constraints often experienced by the government, as it is practically impossible for the public sector to cope with the continuous demand for more infrastructure facilities.
- Minimizing political interference in infrastructure initiatives necessitates the establishment of merit-based project selection and continuity frameworks that are shielded from electoral cycles. Legal requirements should stipulate that ongoing projects must be completed prior to the commencement of new ones, irrespective of any changes in administration. Enhancing the independence of implementing agencies will assist in reducing inappropriate political influence during execution processes.
- Enhancing research-oriented independent feedback mechanisms is crucial for advancing infrastructure governance in Nigeria. The government should formalize partnerships with universities, policy think tanks, and independent research organizations to deliver objective and evidence-based evaluations of public infrastructure initiatives. The consistent release of independent assessment reports

- will improve transparency and guide policy modifications.
- Moreover, the creation of autonomous monitoring institutions free from political interference can guarantee impartial project evaluations. Incorporating data analytics and open-access platforms will further facilitate ongoing monitoring and public examination of project outcomes. These research-driven feedback systems will foster accountability, minimize project abandonment, and aid in the more effective distribution of public resources.

In conclusion, public infrastructure project evaluation and accountability are essential for the success of public infrastructure initiatives, and can help to curb corruption and its tendency in the state. Evaluation and accountability provide valuable insights into existing public infrastructure projects, their effectiveness, and the feedback needed; it helps to identify areas of improvement. Evaluations and accountability not only curb corruption but also serve as a way to learn from experience, improve future project planning and implementation, and ultimately enhance infrastructure development and public service delivery in Nigeria.

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