Assessing the Impact of Politics on the Efficiency of Project Management in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of politics on the efficiency of project management in Nigeria, with specific focus on the Ministry of Capital City Development, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The research was motivated by the persistent problem of project delays, cost overruns, and abandonment of government projects, often linked to political interference. The study sought to: (i) examine the impact of political ideology on government project management; (ii) ascertain the effects of political instability on the efficiency of project management; and (iii) determine the influence of the government's annual budgeting process on project execution. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to staff of the Ministry, while secondary data were drawn from government reports, academic publications, and relevant literature. The study adopted a survey research design with a sample of 100 respondents drawn from the town planning department of the Ministry. Data were analyzed using frequency tables and Chi-Square statistical tests via SPSS v.23. The findings revealed that political ideology strongly influences project prioritization and implementation; political instability disrupts continuity and sustainability; and budgetary politics significantly affects funding flows, project timelines, and overall delivery. The study recommends reducing political interference, ensuring budgetary transparency, strengthening institutional frameworks, and promoting independent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to enhance project efficiency.

Keywords: project management, political interference, political ideology, political instability, government budgeting, Nigeria, Ebonyi State

INTRODUCTION

Project management is defined as the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet project requirements. It is accomplished through the appropriate application and integration of logically grouped project management processes (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2013). Over the last three decades, project management has been recognized as an efficient tool for handling novel or complex activities, and is considered more effective than traditional hierarchical management structures in such contexts (Arash & Mehdi, 2005).

One of the most powerful yet frequently overlooked influencers of successful project management concerns the roles played by knowledgeable personnel in using power and political behaviour to promote successful implementation. Political behaviour defined broadly as any process by which individuals and groups seek, acquire, and maintain power is pervasive in modern organizations and has significant implications for project outcomes (Pfeffer, 1992). In the context of public sector project management, political dynamics are particularly pronounced, given that government officials control resource allocation, project selection, and implementation oversight.

In Nigeria, government-funded projects frequently suffer from delays, cost overruns, and outright abandonment. While technical incompetence and funding gaps are often cited, political interference represents a structural and systemic challenge that is less frequently examined in academic literature. Project managers in the public sector often lack stable bases of authority and must rely on political acumen and negotiation skills to secure necessary resources from functional departments. Without the authority to conduct formal performance evaluations or control rewards and sanctions, these managers must develop alternative influence strategies—including political networking to drive project outcomes.

This study focuses on the Ministry of Capital City Development, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, as a case study to empirically investigate how political ideology, political instability, and government budgetary processes influence the efficiency of project management in Nigeria's public sector.

Statement of the Problem

Government agencies in Nigeria invest substantial resources in project planning and execution, yet projects are frequently derailed by political processes rather than technical or managerial deficiencies. Recalcitrant functional managers, unclear lines of authority, tentative resource commitments, inadequate upper management support, and political favouritism in contract awards are characteristic features of the project management environment in Nigerian public institutions (Olateju, 2019).

Despite the growing body of literature on project management best practices, the intersection of politics and project management in the Nigerian context remains underexplored particularly at the state ministry level. This study addresses that gap by providing empirical evidence on the nature and magnitude of political influence on project management efficiency in Ebonyi State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of politics on the efficiency of project management in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the impact of political ideology on the management of government projects;
2. Ascertain the effect of political instability on the efficiency of government project management; and
3. Determine the influence of government annual budgeting processes on the execution and success of project management.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

1. How does political ideology affect project management?
2. How does political instability affect project management efficiency?
3. How does the government's annual budgeting process affect project management?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

1. H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between political ideology and project management efficiency.
2. H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between political instability and project management efficiency.
3. H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between government annual budgeting and project management efficiency.

Significance of the Study

This study provides valuable insights to policymakers, project managers, development agencies, and scholars. By illuminating the role of politics in shaping project outcomes, stakeholders can develop frameworks and policies that promote accountability and professionalism in public project delivery. The findings may also guide reforms in public procurement and project governance at the state level in Nigeria.

Scope of the Study

The study examines the influence of political ideology, political instability, and government annual budgeting on public project management in Nigeria. It is geographically delimited to the Ministry of Capital City Development, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, and focused on staff within the town planning department.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Project Management

A project is defined as a temporary endeavour with a defined beginning and end, undertaken to create a unique product, service, or result (PMI, 2008). Project management involves the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities in order to meet or exceed stakeholder needs and expectations, balancing competing demands among time, cost, quality, and scope (Pritchard, 2006).

Akarakiri (2007) defines a project as any scheme, or part of a scheme, for investing resources that can be analyzed and evaluated as an independent unit. Project managers act as focal points for all project facets, coordinating the contributions of multiple organizations and stakeholders (Robert, 2003). Harold (1998) describes project management as a blend of art and science—the art of getting things done through people, and the science of managing large amounts of data to balance project duration and cost.

Project Management Practices

Key project management knowledge areas include scope management, cost management, communications management, and risk management. Project scope management involves identifying, defining, and controlling what work is and is not included in the project (PMI, 2004). Project cost management encompasses resource planning, cost estimation, budgeting, and cost control to ensure project completion within an approved budget (Langfield-Smith et al., 2006). Project communications management ensures timely and appropriate generation, collection, and distribution of project information to all relevant stakeholders (PMI, 2004; Heerkens, 2001).

Project Risk Management

Risk management is an increasingly important component of project management, driven by globalization and intensifying competition (Ahmed et al., 2007). The risk management process involves identifying, analyzing, assessing, treating, monitoring, and communicating risks to enable continuous improvement of decision-making (Standards Australia, 1999). PMBOK (2000) defines project risk management as the systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and responding to project risk, including maximizing the probability of positive events and minimizing adverse ones.

Political Implications for Project Management

Project managers who operate without acknowledging the political dimension of their organizations are at a significant disadvantage. The vast majority of managers dislike engaging in political activities, yet simultaneously acknowledge that political manoeuvring is a prerequisite for organizational success (Pfeffer, 1992). Two key implications arise for project managers:

First, project managers must acknowledge the ubiquity of political behaviour and its impact on project outcomes. Without this acknowledgment, political risks remain unaddressed and potentially fatal to project success. Second, project managers must develop strategies for operating effectively within the political environment not by adopting predatory or unethical conduct, but by cultivating networks, managing stakeholder expectations, and employing principled negotiation.

Theoretical Framework

Project Theory

This study is grounded in Koskela's (2000) project theory, which integrates transformation, flow, and value generation as the foundational elements of project production systems. The model extends classical project management thinking by incorporating time, variability, and customer value into the conceptualization of operations. From a managerial perspective, this theoretical foundation supports the idea that planning must structure environments for purposeful action, and that control must focus on identifying and addressing root causes of deviations rather than merely adjusting performance targets.

Empirical Review

Ollows (2012) investigated the impact of project management practices on organizational performance in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), using Letan Limited as a case study. The study found that project cost management and scope management were the most significant practices influencing organizational performance, while the integration of all project management practices was necessary for optimal outcomes.

Irefib (2013) evaluated the effect of project management on the performance of a construction firm in Nigeria using a survey design and chi-square analysis. The findings revealed a significant relationship between project quality management and business success, recommending greater emphasis on project management skills in construction project planning and execution.

Olateju (2019) found that government officials frequently interfere with project selection, contract awards, and execution, causing delays, inefficiencies, and misalignment with technical requirements. Adebayo (2017) similarly demonstrated that political involvement significantly prolongs project execution timelines through bureaucratic bottlenecks, often extending 1-2 year projects to 5-10 years or resulting in outright abandonment.

Akinola and Awotokun (2018) documented that public contracts in Nigeria are frequently awarded based on political loyalty rather than technical competence, leading to substandard work, cost overruns, and project abandonment. Okeke (2020) found that successive governments tend to cancel or rebrand projects initiated by predecessors, resulting in resource wastage, duplication, and an accumulation of abandoned infrastructure.

Gaps in the Literature

The existing body of literature reveals several identifiable gaps. Most previous studies have focused on the national or regional level, with limited attention to state-level ministries such as the Ministry of Capital City Development. Existing studies have rarely disaggregated political influence into its distinct dimensions—ideology, instability, and budgetary processes for separate empirical analysis. Additionally, few studies have combined primary data collection with statistical hypothesis testing to establish causal relationships between political dynamics and specific project efficiency outcomes. This study addresses these gaps by providing localized, variable-specific, and empirically supported insights.

Table 1: Summary of Empirical Review

Author(s) & Year	**Focus of Study**	**Key Findings**	**Implication for PM Efficiency**
Ollows (2012)	Impact of PM practices on SME organizational performance	Cost and scope management were most significant for organizational performance	Improved cost and time performance
Irefib (2013)	Effects of PM on construction firm performance in Nigeria	Significant relationship between quality management and business success	Poor quality leads to project failure

Olateju (2019)	Political interference in public projects	Government officials frequently interfere with project selection and execution	Causes delays, inefficiencies, and misalignment with technical needs
Adebayo (2017)	Political influence and project execution duration	Political involvement prolongs execution through bureaucratic bottlenecks	Significantly increases project duration and delays service delivery
Akinola & Awotokun (2018)	Political patronage in contract awards	Contracts awarded based on political loyalty rather than competence	Results in substandard work, abandonment, and cost overruns
Okeke (2020)	Policy discontinuity after regime change	Successive governments abandon or rebrand predecessors' projects	Resource wastage, duplication, and high rate of abandoned projects

Source: Authors' Compilation (2025)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design, which is appropriate given the nature of the inquiry, wherein the opinions and experiences of participants are systematically elicited and quantified (Singleton & Straits, 2009). A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires with qualitative insights from secondary literature.

Study Area

The study was conducted at the Ministry of Capital City Development, Abakaliki, and the capital of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Ebonyi State, created in 1996 and located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, has experienced multiple political administrations with varying developmental priorities. The Ministry is responsible for the planning, coordination, and supervision of urban and infrastructural development projects, making it an appropriate locus for examining the effects of political dynamics on project management.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised all staff and management of the Ministry of Capital City Development, Abakaliki, totalling 120 individuals (Udoyen, 2019). Convenience sampling was employed to select 120 respondents from the total population, from whom 100 completed questionnaires were returned and validated, representing a response rate of 83.3%.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items directly aligned with the study objectives and research questions. The questionnaire was personally administered by the researcher. Content validity was established through review by the project supervisor, and reliability was confirmed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient ($r = 0.68$), which falls within the acceptable range of 0.67–0.87 (Taber, 2017).

Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency tables and the Chi-Square (χ^2) statistical test to establish the relationships between the study variables. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 23.

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Secondary data were sourced from government reports, academic journals, textbooks, and published and unpublished articles.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	48 (48%)
	Female	52 (52%)
Age	20–30 years	24 (24%)
	31–40 years	47 (47%)
	Above 40 years	29 (29%)
Marital Status	Single	13 (13%)
	Married	87 (87%)
Educational Qualification	SSCE	11 (11%)
	HND/B.Sc.	80 (80%)
	M.Sc./Ph.D.	9 (9%)
Position	Commissioner	12 (12%)
	Permanent Secretary	31 (31%)
	HOD Town Planning	26 (26%)
	HOD Building	24 (24%)
	Project Inspectors	7 (7%)

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Research Question Responses

Table 3: Responses to Research Questions (N = 100)

Research Question	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Undecided n (%)
Does political ideology affect project management?	60 (60%)	19 (19%)	21 (21%)
Does political instability affect project management?	56 (56%)	21 (21%)	23 (23%)
Does government annual budgeting affect project management?	61 (61%)	17 (17%)	22 (22%)

Source: Field Survey (2025)

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Hypothesis Testing

All three null hypotheses were tested using the Chi-Square (χ^2) statistic at the 0.05 level of significance. Results are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test Results for All Hypotheses

Hypothesis	χ^2 Value	df	p-value	Decision
H_{01}: Political ideology & PM efficiency	19.284	2	.000	Reject H_0
H_{02}: Political instability & PM efficiency	94.550	2	.000	Reject H_0
H_{03}: Government budgeting & PM efficiency	159.548	2	.000	Reject H_0

Source: SPSS v.23 Output (2025); Significant at $p < 0.05$

All three null hypotheses were rejected at the 0.05 level of significance, indicating statistically significant relationships between political ideology, political instability, and government budgeting on one hand, and project management efficiency on the other. Notably, the Chi-Square value for government budgeting ($\chi^2 = 159.548$) was substantially higher than for political ideology ($\chi^2 = 19.284$), suggesting that budgetary politics may exert the greatest influence on project management outcomes among the variables examined.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding that political ideology significantly influences project management ($\chi^2 = 19.284$, $p < .001$) corroborates the work of Olateju (2019) and Adebayo (2017), who observed that political considerations routinely override technical criteria in the selection and prioritization of government projects in Nigeria. When project decisions are driven by ideological or partisan calculations, the result is misallocation of resources and inconsistent project selection criteria.

The significant relationship between political instability and project management ($\chi^2 = 94.550$, $p < .001$) aligns with Okeke's (2020) findings on policy discontinuity. Frequent changes in government leadership result in the abandonment or rebranding of ongoing projects, disrupting implementation timelines and wasting public resources. This cyclical instability undermines the continuity required for long-term infrastructural development.

The strongest chi-square value recorded for government annual budgeting ($\chi^2 = 159.548$, $p < .001$)—confirms the critical role of budgetary politics in shaping project outcomes. Aliyu (2019) and Onyekachi (2020) similarly documented the pervasive influence of political considerations in budget allocation, which often leads to irregular fund releases, underfunding of critical projects, and diversion of appropriated funds.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study has provided empirical evidence that political ideology, political instability, and government budgetary processes significantly influence the efficiency of project management in Nigeria's public sector, as demonstrated at the Ministry of Capital City Development, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The findings demonstrate that while politics is an inherent feature of governance, unchecked political interference undermines the principles of efficiency, accountability, and sustainability in public project execution.

A well-structured project management framework, insulated from undue political interference, is essential for ensuring that government projects achieve their developmental objectives. This study concludes that for project management in Nigeria to be efficient and effective, political considerations must be minimized, budgetary transparency must be enforced, and comprehensive institutional reforms must be pursued.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Government should establish clear and enforceable legal frameworks to minimize undue political interference in project selection, contracting, implementation, and resource allocation processes within Nigeria.

2. Political stability and policy continuity should be strengthened through constitutional and institutional mechanisms that guarantee the continuation of development projects across successive administrations, thereby reducing project abandonment and enhancing sustainability.

3. Budgeting and public financial management processes should be transparent, participatory, and strictly monitored to ensure accountability, proper utilization of resources, and timely release of appropriated project funds.

4. Independent monitoring and evaluation bodies should be established and empowered to oversee project implementation, improve transparency, and ensure compliance with established regulations and professional standards.

5. Merit-based appointment systems should be adopted in the selection of project managers and technical personnel to reduce politically motivated appointments and enhance professionalism and project performance.

6. Project managers and public-sector personnel should receive continuous training in political risk management, stakeholder engagement, and ethical project management practices to strengthen institutional capacity and effective project delivery.

7. Anti-corruption agencies, civil society organizations, and citizens should be actively engaged and empowered to monitor public projects and ensure that public interest, accountability, and transparency remain central to project decision-making processes.

8. Future researchers should adopt mixed-method research approaches and comparative studies across different regions and sectors in Nigeria to provide broader, more balanced, and generalizable findings on the influence of politics on project management outcomes.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study makes the following contributions to the academic and policy literature:

1. It provides state-level empirical evidence on how political ideology shapes the management and prioritization of government projects in Ebonyi State, filling an important contextual gap in the literature.
2. It reveals, through disaggregated analysis, the distinct effects of political instability on the efficiency and sustainability of project management in state ministries.
3. It demonstrates the quantifiable impact of budgetary politics on project funding, timelines, and overall delivery using chi-square statistical methodology.
4. It contributes practical, policy-oriented recommendations applicable to state-level project management reform in Nigeria.

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