CONSTITUENCY PROJECTS AND CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA'S BUDGETARY PROCESS

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Abstract
This article examines the governance and corruption risks associated with constituency projects within Nigeria's federal budgetary process. Constituency projects, also referred to as zonal intervention projects, were introduced to direct public investment towards locally identified development needs. The study does not treat the existence of a failed, delayed or poorly executed project as proof of corruption. Instead, it uses a documentary analytical framework that distinguishes allegations, documented implementation irregularities and institutional weaknesses. Corruption-related indicators examined include documented diversion or misapplication of public funds, procurement irregularities, unexplained discrepancies between approved specifications and delivered outputs, conflicts of interest, non-execution where documentary evidence establishes an accountability concern, and other formally recorded infractions. The study uses qualitative documentary analysis of peer-reviewed literature, official budget and procurement materials, anti-corruption agency tracking reports and credible civil-society evidence covering 1999-2025. Particular attention is given to recent evidence from the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), including its constituency and executive projects tracking exercises. The evidence shows that constituency projects can generate developmental benefits, but accountability risks arise where project selection, procurement, supervision, disclosure and verification are weak. The evidence also indicates that several problems attributed to constituency projects have alternative explanations, including delayed fund releases, procurement and contracting weaknesses, inadequate supervision and institutional capacity constraints. The study therefore finds no basis for treating constituency projects as uniquely or inherently corrupt. Rather, their vulnerability is better understood as a function of the interaction between political incentives, information asymmetry and the quality of formal accountability institutions. The article contributes by developing an evidence-classification framework for analysing constituency-project corruption and by comparing constituency-project risks with broader public-project governance problems.

Keywords: Constituency projects, zonal intervention projects, corruption, budgetary process, public procurement, budget transparency

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria's federal budget is a central instrument through which public resources are planned, appropriated and allocated among competing development priorities. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, the budgetary process has involved interactions among the executive, legislature, ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), oversight institutions, contractors, civil society organisations and citizens. The process therefore has both technical and political dimensions. Budget preparation and approval determine priorities, implementation translates appropriations into expenditure and projects, while audit and legislative oversight provide mechanisms for accountability.

Constituency projects occupy a distinctive position within this process. They are commonly described as zonal intervention projects and are included in federal budgets for interventions in constituencies represented by members of the National Assembly. The underlying developmental rationale is that legislators, because of their direct contact with constituents, can identify local infrastructure and social needs that may not receive adequate attention through broader sectoral programmes. The ICPC's Phase V tracking report similarly records that zonal intervention projects were conceived as a means of bringing development closer to communities and responding to perceived local infrastructure needs (ICPC, 2023). Recent government discussions have continued to identify infrastructure, service delivery, community empowerment and local employment among the intended benefits of such interventions (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation [FMINO], 2025).

The existence of constituency projects should therefore not be equated with corruption. The governance question is whether the processes through which projects are selected, appropriated, procured, implemented, monitored and reported provide adequate safeguards against misuse of public resources. A project may be delayed because of a late release of funds, abandoned because of contractual or planning problems, or poorly executed because of weak supervision without the available evidence establishing corrupt intent. Conversely, procurement manipulation, diversion of funds, conflicts of interest, false reporting or deliberate delivery below contractual specifications may constitute stronger evidence of corruption or an accountability violation when supported by credible documentation.

This distinction is particularly important because recent evidence has moved the discussion beyond general allegations. The ICPC's Phase V tracking exercise selected 712 constituency and related projects across 21 states for physical and documentary tracking from projects contained in the 2019–2021 zonal intervention budgets. The tracking process involved the ICPC, Budget Office of the Federation, Bureau of Public Procurement, Office of the Auditor-General for the Federation, quantity surveyors, civil-society organisations and the media (ICPC, 2023). The report identified project underperformance, procurement concerns, conflicts of interest and other irregularities and also recorded recoveries and corrective actions. More recent ICPC reporting states that its subsequent tracking work generated several criminal cases at different stages of court proceedings and produced financial and asset recoveries, while also identifying projects that were properly executed. These developments provide a stronger empirical basis for analysing constituency-project governance than general claims about corruption.

The broader public-finance environment also matters. The International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Survey 2023 gave Nigeria a transparency score of 31 out of 100, a public-participation score of 19 and an oversight score of 61, based on information available through the end of 2022 (International Budget Partnership [IBP], 2023). These findings suggest that

information and participation constraints extend beyond constituency projects. Similarly, the Federal Government has continued to revise procurement procedures and deploy electronic procurement systems, while the Bureau of Public Procurement revised procurement thresholds in 2025 (FMINO, 2025). The existence of reforms means that evidence from earlier periods should not simply be assumed to describe current arrangements.

Against this background, the study addresses a specific gap. Existing literature contains substantial work on corruption in Nigeria's public sector and on budget implementation, but the evidence is dispersed across general public expenditure studies, constituency-project studies, procurement research and anti-corruption tracking reports. There is comparatively less synthesis that systematically distinguishes documented corruption from allegations and ordinary implementation failure, compares constituency-project risks with wider public-project risks, and interprets the evidence in light of recent budget transparency and procurement reforms. This article addresses that gap through a documentary analytical framework rather than by claiming a statistical causal relationship.

The study has four objectives: (a) to examine the development and governance structure of constituency projects within Nigeria's federal budgetary process; (b) to identify and classify documented corruption-related risks and implementation weaknesses associated with constituency projects; (c) to compare constituency-project governance risks with problems documented in other categories of publicly funded projects; and (d) to assess the relevance of institutional, transparency and procurement reforms and derive evidence-linked policy implications.

The contribution of the study is threefold. First, it introduces an evidence-classification approach that separates allegations, documented irregularities and institutional weaknesses. Second, it provides a systematic synthesis of documentary evidence rather than treating all poor project outcomes as corruption. Third, it places constituency projects within the wider public-project governance environment, thereby avoiding the unsupported conclusion that constituency projects are uniquely vulnerable. The study covers the Fourth Republic from 1999 to 2025, while giving greater analytical weight to recent evidence where it is available.

2.0 Literature Review

Corruption in public finance refers broadly to the misuse of entrusted public authority for private or sectional benefit. In project governance, however, the concept needs to be operationalised carefully. A procurement irregularity, a delayed project and a proven diversion of public funds are not analytically identical. Treating them as one category can exaggerate the empirical evidence and weaken causal interpretation.

For this study, three evidence categories are distinguished. First, a corruption allegation is a reported accusation that has not, within the documentary material examined, been established by an official investigation, audit finding, court decision or sufficiently corroborated evidence. Allegations are relevant as signals for further inquiry but are not treated as verified corruption. Second, a documented corruption-related case or infraction is an event supported by an official investigation, anti-corruption tracking report, audit finding, court record, recovery action or convergent documentary evidence that identifies a specific irregularity. The study reports such evidence with attribution and does not imply criminal guilt where a case remains under investigation or before the courts. Third, institutional weakness refers to deficiencies in rules, capacity, supervision, disclosure, procurement administration, monitoring or

enforcement. An institutional weakness can create an opportunity for corruption but is not itself proof that corruption occurred.

This distinction responds directly to a central problem in the literature: the tendency to use terms such as corruption, mismanagement, poor implementation, abandonment and political interference interchangeably. The analytical framework used here instead asks what the evidence establishes. Where the evidence establishes only poor performance, the finding is reported as implementation weakness. Where an official source identifies a procurement or financial irregularity, the finding is reported as an irregularity or documented corruption-related risk. Where an allegation has not been verified, it is identified as an allegation.

Constituency Projects and Their Developmental Rationale

Constituency projects developed within Nigeria's democratic budgetary practice as a mechanism for directing federal interventions towards local communities. The ICPC reports that zonal intervention projects began around 2000 following concerns expressed by legislators about infrastructure gaps in their constituencies. The original rationale was therefore developmental rather than corrupt. The ICPC also records that the programme subsequently encountered weaknesses in project governance, including poor execution and abuse (ICPC, 2023).

Recent literature continues to present both sides of this debate. Nwakodo et al. (2025) describe constituency projects as potentially useful instruments for infrastructure, services and community development while identifying transparency, oversight and politicisation as continuing governance concerns. Adekeye and Ofoma (2023) similarly examine federal constituency projects in Kogi State in relation to infrastructure development. These studies reinforce the need to examine actual implementation rather than assume that the programme is either wholly developmental or wholly corrupt.

A further governance complication arises from the division of responsibilities. Legislators participate in project identification and political sponsorship, whereas implementation is generally undertaken through MDAs and contractors. This arrangement can create accountability ambiguity: the actor associated politically with a project may not be the formal implementing authority, while the formal implementing authority may face pressure from political sponsors. The governance problem is therefore institutional as much as individual.

Nigeria's Budgetary Process and Accountability

Nigeria's budgetary cycle can be analysed through preparation, legislative approval, implementation and audit. Each stage presents distinct accountability requirements. Preparation requires credible costing and prioritisation; approval requires transparent legislative scrutiny; implementation requires timely releases, procurement compliance and project supervision; and audit requires independent examination and follow-up.

Recent evidence indicates that transparency and participation remain important constraints. The IBP's 2023 assessment scored Nigeria 31/100 on budget transparency and 19/100 on public participation, although oversight received a higher composite score of 61/100. The assessment also identified delays or limited online availability of several budget and audit documents (IBP, 2023). These findings are not specific to constituency projects, but they provide important context for understanding why citizens may find it difficult to verify project allocations, payments and outcomes.

At the institutional level, Nigeria has also undertaken reforms intended to improve fiscal transparency. The Fiscal Responsibility Commission's 2024 report reiterates statutory requirements for transparency and timely publication of fiscal information under the Fiscal Responsibility Act, including obligations relating to budget execution reporting and audited accounts (Fiscal Responsibility Commission [FRC], 2025). The coexistence of formal requirements and continuing information gaps illustrates the difference between the existence of rules and their effective implementation.

Public Procurement and Project Delivery

Public procurement is a major control point because the movement from appropriation to a physical project involves tendering, contractor selection, contract pricing, certification, payment and supervision. Weaknesses at any of these points may affect project outcomes. Importantly, procurement weakness is not synonymous with corruption. A procurement delay may result from administrative or capacity problems, whereas bid manipulation, undisclosed conflicts of interest or deliberate circumvention of procurement requirements raise more direct corruption concerns.

Recent reforms demonstrate that the procurement environment is not static. In 2025, the Bureau of Public Procurement revised procurement thresholds and reiterated the use of approved standard bidding documents, while also indicating that contractors involved in corrupt or fraudulent acts could face debarment under its statutory powers (FMINO, 2025). The BPP has also been associated with the deployment of electronic procurement systems intended to strengthen transparency and efficiency. These developments should be considered when interpreting evidence from earlier years.

Evidence from Constituency Project Tracking

The strongest recent documentary evidence in the study is provided by ICPC's constituency and executive projects tracking initiative. In Phase V, 1,377 projects were preselected from the 2019, 2020 and 2021 zonal intervention budgets, of which 712 projects across 21 states were selected for tracking. The exercise involved physical inspection, professional quantity-surveyor assessment and documentary review, supported by several public institutions and civil-society actors (ICPC, 2023).

The report provides evidence at different levels of severity. It identifies underperformance involving poor or substandard execution, undersupply of items and deviations from bills of quantities. It also records cases in which funds were recovered or contractors were required to return to site. In one group of findings, ICPC reported that approximately 80% of cash recoveries during the phase were associated with project underperformance. Such evidence establishes a project-delivery problem and, where funds were recovered, an accountability response; it should not automatically be interpreted as a judicial finding that every contractor or sponsor committed a criminal offence.

The report also documents more specific concerns. It identifies alleged attempts by some project sponsors to influence contractor selection and receive payments from prospective contractors. Because the report describes these matters as intelligence or allegations in some instances, this study retains the distinction between allegation and established case. Other entries provide more concrete documentary evidence, including incomplete works, missing bill-of-quantity items, defective construction and refunds. For example, the report records a primary health-care centre project in Katsina for which missing items were to be supplied, and several Delta State projects where works were reported as not conforming to

specifications. These examples demonstrate how physical verification can identify accountability problems without requiring the researcher to infer criminal intent.

More recent ICPC reporting on Phase 6 states that several criminal cases arising from tracking exercises were at different stages in courts of competent jurisdiction and reports recoveries of cash and assets as well as savings attributed to project monitoring (ICPC, 2024). The appropriate interpretation is that the tracking initiative has generated enforcement activity and financial recoveries; it does not establish that all constituency projects are corrupt or that every reported infraction has resulted in a conviction.

Corruption Risks and Institutional Weaknesses

Five recurring risk areas emerge from the literature and documentary evidence: budget and cost manipulation; procurement irregularities; non-execution or underperformance; diversion or misapplication; and information and monitoring weaknesses. Budget manipulation may involve unrealistic cost estimates or changes in project descriptions that make verification difficult. Procurement risks may include non-competitive practices, conflicts of interest or improper tendering. Non-execution and underperformance refer to physical outcomes that do not match approved specifications or expected delivery. Diversion involves the use of public funds for purposes other than those approved. Information and monitoring weaknesses concern the inability of citizens or oversight institutions to establish what was approved, paid and delivered.

These categories interact. Weak monitoring may allow underperformance to continue; unclear project descriptions may make verification difficult; and procurement deficiencies may increase the risk of poor contractor selection. However, the direction of causation cannot be established from the documentary design. The appropriate conclusion is that these institutional conditions can create opportunities or increase exposure to corruption risks, not that they necessarily cause corruption in every project.

Alternative Explanations

Three alternative explanations deserve explicit attention. First, funding delays can produce incomplete projects without corruption. Second, procurement and contractor-capacity problems can generate cost overruns, delays or poor-quality outputs. Third, weak MDA capacity, inadequate supervision and poor project planning can result in failure even where there is no deliberate diversion of funds. Existing Nigerian budget research has identified delayed releases, weak monitoring and implementation planning as constraints on capital expenditure (Edeme & Nkalu, 2017; Effiom & Edet, 2020).

These explanations do not eliminate corruption risk. Rather, they prevent over-attribution. A rigorous analysis should therefore distinguish a documented financial or procurement infraction from a project that is merely delayed, incomplete or defective. This distinction is central to the present study.

Digital Transparency and Civil Society Monitoring

Digital transparency provides an important contemporary dimension. Olarewaju (2026) argues that publicly accessible digital budget systems and citizen monitoring can strengthen transparency and value creation, although technical capacity, enforcement and political resistance may limit their effect. Nigeria's budget institutions have continued to publish budget documents online, and the IBP has highlighted the importance of timely access to in-year reports, audit reports and other budget information (IBP, 2023).

Civil-society monitoring can complement official oversight by comparing budget allocations with physical project delivery. Its effectiveness nevertheless depends on access to accurate data, security, technical capacity and institutional willingness to respond to verified findings. Digital tools should therefore be treated as accountability infrastructure rather than as automatic solutions to corruption.

Theoretical Framework

The study combines Principal-Agent Theory, Institutional Theory and Public Choice/Political Economy perspectives. The theories are used as complementary lenses rather than as competing statistical models.

Principal-Agent Theory

Principal-Agent Theory explains problems that arise when one party delegates authority to another whose actions cannot be fully observed. Ross (1973) provides the foundational economic treatment of the agency problem. In constituency projects, citizens can be viewed as ultimate principals, while elected representatives and implementing public officials operate through delegated authority. Information asymmetry arises when citizens cannot readily observe project selection, contract prices, payments, implementation status and completion quality. Monitoring costs and limited access to information can consequently weaken accountability.

The theory does not imply that legislators or public officials are inherently corrupt. Rather, it identifies conditions under which opportunistic behaviour may become difficult to detect. In the present study, the relevant mechanism is therefore information asymmetry → weak monitoring → increased opportunity for misuse or non-compliance. This mechanism is moderated by disclosure, auditing, procurement controls and citizen monitoring.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory directs attention to the formal rules and informal practices that shape behaviour. March and Olsen (1984) emphasised the importance of institutions in understanding political and organisational behaviour. In the constituency-project context, relevant institutions include appropriation rules, procurement requirements, MDA responsibilities, audit procedures, anti-corruption agencies and disclosure mechanisms. Where formal rules are weakly enforced, informal practices may influence implementation. The theory therefore helps explain why the existence of laws does not automatically produce effective accountability.

Public Choice and Political Economy

Public Choice and political economy perspectives highlight the incentives created by political competition and control over public resources. Constituency projects have political visibility because legislators can associate themselves with local development outcomes. This creates legitimate incentives to respond to constituents, but it may also generate pressure over project selection, contractor preferences and implementation visibility. The analytical point is not that political incentives produce corruption automatically. Rather, political incentives can interact with weak institutional checks and information asymmetry to create conditions in which accountability is more difficult.

The combined framework can therefore be represented as follows: political incentives influence project preferences and allocation; institutional rules determine the permissible procedures; information asymmetry affects monitoring; procurement and supervision determine implementation quality; and transparency and enforcement influence whether

irregularities are detected and corrected. The framework provides a clearer theoretical bridge between constituency projects and corruption risk without claiming a causal effect that the documentary design cannot estimate.

Table 1
Analytical Framework for Documentary Assessment

Evidence dimension	Indicator examined	Evidence threshold	Interpretation
Corruption allegation	Reported bribery, diversion, contractor manipulation	Claim without sufficient verification	Reported as allegation; no finding of guilt
Documented irregularity	Procurement breach, missing items, unexplained discrepancy, refund/recovery	Official report, audit, tracking record or corroborated evidence	Accountability problem; criminal status stated cautiously
Implementation weakness	Delay, abandonment, underperformance, poor quality	Physical/documentary evidence of non-delivery or poor delivery	Not treated as corruption unless additional evidence supports it
Institutional weakness	Weak monitoring, disclosure, capacity, enforcement	Documented procedural or institutional deficiency	Potential enabling condition, not proof of corruption

Source: Authors Compilation, 2026.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative documentary research design. It uses documentary analysis and a critical review of published empirical and conceptual literature to examine constituency-project governance and corruption risks. The design is appropriate because the study seeks to synthesise institutional evidence and documented cases rather than estimate the statistical prevalence or causal effect of corruption.

Sources and Period

The study covers the period 1999-2025, corresponding broadly with the Fourth Republic and the period in which constituency projects became established in federal budgetary practice. Sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, official federal budget documents, ICPC constituency and executive project tracking reports, procurement materials, fiscal transparency reports and credible civil-society or policy research. Greater weight is given to recent evidence, particularly sources published from 2020 to 2025, while older theoretical works are retained where they provide foundational concepts.

Documentary Selection and Corroboration

Documents were selected according to four criteria: relevance to constituency projects or public-project governance; identifiable authorship or institutional origin; sufficient detail to identify the governance issue being discussed; and accessibility for cross-checking. Where a claim concerned an alleged corruption case, the study sought corroboration through official tracking, audit, investigation, recovery or court-related information where available. Media and civil-society reports were treated as supplementary evidence rather than automatically equivalent to official findings.

Operational Assessment of Corruption

Because the study does not use survey respondents or a statistical corruption index, corruption is not 'measured' as a numerical dependent variable. Instead, it is operationalised through documentary indicators. The principal indicators are: (i) documented diversion or misapplication of public funds; (ii) procurement irregularities or conflicts of interest identified by competent authorities; (iii) discrepancies between approved bills of

quantities/specifications and verified delivery where the discrepancy generated an accountability response; (iv) documented non-execution associated with financial or contractual irregularity; (v) recovery, refund or enforcement action linked to a documented project irregularity; and (vi) formally recorded failures in disclosure or monitoring that create identifiable accountability risks.

These indicators are proxies for documentary assessment rather than estimates of the prevalence of corruption. A project is not classified as corrupt merely because it is incomplete, delayed, abandoned or poorly executed. Such outcomes are coded as implementation weaknesses unless the documentary evidence provides an additional basis for a corruption-related interpretation.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis followed four stages. First, relevant documents were read to identify project governance issues and evidence of corruption-related risks. Second, evidence was classified into allegations, documented irregularities, implementation weaknesses and institutional weaknesses. Third, the evidence was grouped by governance mechanism: budgeting and costing, procurement, implementation and supervision, information disclosure, monitoring and enforcement. Fourth, the constituency-project evidence was compared with broader evidence on executive and infrastructure projects to determine whether the identified problems are specific to constituency projects or reflect wider public-project governance weaknesses.

Objectivity, Reliability and Bias Control

No respondents were surveyed or interviewed in this study. Consequently, respondent recall bias and survey perception bias do not arise as methodological issues. The principal risks are source selection bias and researcher interpretation. These were addressed through source triangulation, explicit evidence classification and cautious language. Claims about corruption are attributed to the source that documented them, and allegations are not converted into findings of guilt. Official tracking evidence is considered alongside peer-reviewed research and independent budget-transparency evidence. The analysis also records alternative explanations where the documentary evidence permits them.

Scope and Limitations

The documentary design cannot estimate the proportion of constituency projects affected by corruption, establish a counterfactual corruption rate for non-constituency projects, or demonstrate that constituency projects cause corruption. The comparison with other public projects is therefore analytical rather than a statistical test. In addition, official tracking exercises are purposive rather than random; tracked projects may have been selected because of value, sectoral importance, geographical spread or complaints. The study therefore avoids generalising the incidence observed in tracked projects to all constituency projects.

5.0 Findings and Analysis

Governance Structure and Points of Vulnerability

The evidence indicates that constituency projects pass through several decision points: identification and nomination, budget inclusion, appropriation, project design and procurement, implementation, certification and payment, monitoring, and audit. Each stage creates a different accountability requirement. Political actors may influence project preferences, while MDAs retain formal implementation responsibilities. Contractors execute physical works, and oversight institutions verify compliance. The separation between

political sponsorship and formal implementation can therefore produce ambiguity over who is accountable for a project's final outcome.

The evidence also suggests that vulnerability is not uniform. A project with a clear description, realistic cost, competitive procurement, identifiable location, independent supervision and public reporting is easier to monitor than a project with vague specifications and limited disclosure. Vulnerability is consequently a function of governance arrangements rather than an intrinsic property of constituency projects.

Table 2
Evidence Classification: Allegations, Documented Cases and Weaknesses

Category	Evidence observed	Interpretive conclusion
Allegations	Reports of sponsors demanding payments or influencing contractors	Important warning signal; not treated as proven corruption unless independently established
Documented irregularities	Physical/documentary findings of missing items, non-compliance with specifications, recoveries and corrective actions	Establishes an accountability or implementation irregularity; criminal liability depends on competent proceedings
Implementation weaknesses	Delayed, incomplete, abandoned or substandard projects	Evidence of delivery failure; corruption is not inferred without additional evidence
Institutional weaknesses	Weak supervision, limited disclosure, capacity constraints, procurement and monitoring gaps	Potential enabling conditions for irregularities

Source: Authors Compilation, 2026.

This classification changes the interpretation of the literature. For example, ICPC's tracking reports contain projects requiring contractors to return to site, rectify defects, supply missing items or refund money. These findings demonstrate that public resources were not always translated into the required outputs, but they do not mean that every case constitutes criminal corruption. The more defensible conclusion is that the projects contained documented accountability and implementation problems, some of which generated recovery or enforcement responses.

Documented Procurement and Project-Execution Risks

ICPC's Phase V evidence provides concrete examples of project-level irregularities. The report records cases where works were not completed according to specifications, missing bill-of-quantity items had to be supplied, defects required correction, and contractors were sent back to site. In some instances, the report identifies refunds or recovery actions. Such evidence is stronger than a general claim of corruption because it links the governance problem to an identifiable project and an observable corrective action.

The report also identifies procurement and conflict-of-interest risks, including concerns over selective tendering, conflicts between project sponsors or facilitators and civil servants, and attempts to influence contractor selection. Where the report uses language of intelligence or allegation, the present study retains that qualification. Where the report records a completed

corrective or recovery action, the study reports that action without inferring a criminal conviction.

This distinction is especially important for the term 'budget padding'. A difference between an initial project estimate and a later contract price is not, by itself, proof of padding. A corruption interpretation requires evidence of manipulation, collusion, false costing or another improper act. The same principle applies to inflated contract costs: a high price should prompt verification against specifications, market prices and procurement documentation rather than being labelled corrupt solely because it appears high.

Underperformance, Non-Execution and the Problem of Attribution

Project underperformance is one of the clearest recurring problems in the documentary evidence. ICPC reports poor or substandard execution, undersupply and deviations from bills of quantities. Yet underperformance can arise from several mechanisms. A contractor may lack capacity; supervision may be weak; payments may be delayed; project design may be inadequate; or there may be deliberate diversion or collusion. The documentary evidence must therefore establish which mechanism is supported before a corruption label is applied.

The findings also show that monitoring can change outcomes. ICPC reports that tracking resulted in contractors returning to sites, corrections being made and recoveries being obtained. This suggests that some observed project failures are not static outcomes but problems that can be identified and corrected through stronger monitoring. The evidence therefore supports an institutional rather than purely behavioural interpretation.

Comparison with Other Public Projects

The reviewer's concern about whether constituency projects are uniquely vulnerable is addressed by comparing the evidence with wider public-project governance. ICPC's tracking initiative itself provides a useful comparison because it expanded from zonal intervention projects to executive projects. The Phase V report notes that executive projects dominate the annual federal budget and that the tracking exercise included them alongside constituency projects. The broader literature also documents corruption risks in large infrastructure projects, including political influence, patronage and enforcement weaknesses (Olugboyega, 2024), while Adedeji et al. (2017) identify governance factors affecting public project delivery in Ondo State.

The evidence therefore does not support the conclusion that constituency projects are uniquely corrupt. Similar problems occur in wider public procurement and infrastructure delivery. What may be distinctive about constituency projects is the combination of geographically dispersed small projects, political sponsorship, multiple accountability relationships and the difficulty of monitoring numerous local interventions. These features can increase monitoring complexity, but they do not establish a higher corruption rate without comparative statistical evidence.

The comparison is reinforced by ICPC's tracking of executive projects and by its 2025 stakeholder discussion, which identified poor needs assessment, delayed releases, contractor inefficiency and weak monitoring as challenges affecting zonal intervention projects. Several of these problems are common to public projects generally. Constituency projects should therefore be understood as one institutional setting in which broader public-finance weaknesses become visible.

Alternative Explanations and Competing Mechanisms

The documentary evidence points to at least four competing mechanisms: funding delays, procurement administration, contractor capacity and institutional monitoring. Budget implementation studies have long identified delayed releases and weak monitoring as constraints, while recent government sources continue to identify delayed releases and contractor inefficiency among constituency-project challenges (FMINO, 2025).

This finding matters for policy. If a project fails because funds were not released on time, the appropriate intervention is different from the response to a procurement fraud case. If a project is poorly executed because supervision failed, strengthening technical certification may be more relevant than increasing criminal sanctions alone. The evidence therefore supports a differentiated reform strategy.

Budget Transparency and Information Asymmetry

Information is a recurring mechanism across the evidence. Citizens need to know the project description, location, approved amount, implementing MDA, contractor, payment status and physical progress in order to monitor delivery. The IBP's 2023 findings on Nigeria's budget transparency and participation indicate continuing information constraints at the national level. Olarewaju (2026) similarly argues that publicly accessible digital budgets can support monitoring but require technical capacity and enforceable institutional responses.

The implication for constituency projects is not simply to publish more data, but to publish data in a form that allows project-level verification. A digital project register linked to budget appropriations, procurement records, contract values, payments, geolocation and completion evidence would reduce information asymmetry. Such a system would also improve the ability of journalists, civil society and communities to identify discrepancies without relying solely on allegations.

Anti-Corruption Institutions and Reform

The ICPC tracking initiative demonstrates that preventive monitoring can produce both corrective and enforcement outcomes. Phase V involved collaboration among anti-corruption, budget, procurement, audit, technical and civil-society actors. The Phase 6 reporting further indicates that criminal cases, recoveries and savings emerged from the tracking process (ICPC, 2024). These developments suggest that anti-corruption institutions can contribute to project accountability when they have access to technical information and can conduct physical verification.

At the same time, institutional enforcement should not be reduced to punishment. The evidence shows that many project problems can be corrected through monitoring, contractor return-to-site orders, refunds, completion of missing items and improved procurement processes. Preventive controls and timely verification may therefore be as important as post hoc prosecution.

5.0 Discussion

The findings answer the study's central question by showing that the relationship between constituency projects and corruption is conditional rather than automatic. Constituency projects provide a channel through which public resources reach local communities, but the governance arrangements surrounding their allocation and implementation determine how effectively those resources are protected. The evidence is strongest for the existence of project-level irregularities and institutional weaknesses, while the evidence is insufficient to claim that constituency projects as a category cause corruption.

The findings are consistent with Principal-Agent Theory because information asymmetry is repeatedly visible in the difficulty citizens face in observing contractor selection, payments, physical progress and completion status. The ICPC tracking model itself responds to this information problem by bringing technical verification and civil-society participation into the monitoring process. This is consistent with the proposition that monitoring can reduce the space for opportunistic behaviour.

Institutional Theory adds an explanation for why problems persist despite the existence of formal rules. Nigeria has procurement rules, budget procedures, audit requirements and anti-corruption institutions, but the evidence indicates continuing gaps in implementation, supervision, disclosure and enforcement. The difference between formal rules and actual compliance is therefore central to the governance problem.

The Public Choice and political economy perspective adds the political dimension. Legislators have incentives to demonstrate visible development to constituents, and constituency projects are politically salient. This can support legitimate responsiveness but may also create pressure over project choice, contractor preferences and attribution of project benefits. Political incentives become problematic for accountability when formal institutional checks are weak. The evidence therefore supports an interaction model rather than a simple claim that politics equals corruption.

The findings also modify the earlier tendency to treat non-execution or poor execution as evidence of corruption. Recent ICPC and government evidence shows that delayed releases, contractor inefficiency, poor needs assessment and weak monitoring are alternative explanations. Consequently, the study's contribution is not to establish a prevalence rate of corruption, but to clarify the evidential pathway through which corruption risks can be identified and distinguished from other governance failures.

The comparison with other public projects is equally important. Large infrastructure projects and executive projects display many of the same governance risks. The distinctiveness of constituency projects lies more plausibly in their political sponsorship, geographic dispersion and accountability ambiguity than in an empirically demonstrated unique corruption rate. A stronger empirical claim would require project-level comparative data across constituency and non-constituency projects, which is beyond the present documentary design.

Recent reforms further support a cautious interpretation. The BPP's procurement reforms, federal digitalisation initiatives and ICPC's expanded project tracking indicate an evolving governance environment. Older studies remain relevant as foundational explanations of budget and institutional problems, but their findings cannot simply be projected unchanged onto the current system. The appropriate approach is to use older studies to explain mechanisms while using recent official and empirical evidence to assess current manifestations.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The recommendations below are derived directly from the evidence classification and findings rather than from a general assumption that constituency projects are corrupt.

1. Create a project-level public disclosure standard. Every constituency project should have a publicly accessible record showing its description, location, approved amount, implementing MDA, procurement status, contractor, contract sum, payments,

implementation milestones and completion status. This responds directly to the information asymmetry identified in the analysis.
2. Strengthen physical and technical verification. The ICPC tracking evidence shows the value of physical inspection and professional assessment. Verification should occur during implementation rather than only after project completion, with quantity surveyors and relevant technical professionals involved where appropriate.
3. Differentiate implementation failure from corruption in official reporting. Government and oversight reports should separately record delayed release of funds, procurement delay, contractor capacity, technical defects, non-execution, financial irregularities and suspected corruption. This will improve the quality of evidence available for enforcement and policy decisions.
4. Improve procurement transparency and conflict-of-interest controls. Procurement records should identify the procurement method, tender outcome and relevant contract information. Where a conflict of interest is identified, the matter should be referred through established administrative or enforcement procedures rather than resolved informally.
5. Link project monitoring to timely corrective action. Where monitoring identifies missing items, poor workmanship or incomplete works, the implementing authority should establish deadlines for correction, refund or completion and publish the outcome. This recommendation follows the corrective actions documented in ICPC tracking reports.
6. Expand digital integration of budget and project information. Budget, procurement, payment and physical-project information should be connected so that citizens and oversight bodies can trace an appropriation from approval to delivery. Digital systems should include mechanisms for responding to citizen reports rather than merely displaying data.
7. Strengthen the accountability interface between legislators and implementing MDAs. The respective roles of political sponsors, MDAs, contractors and oversight institutions should be clearly documented. This can reduce accountability ambiguity while preserving the legitimate role of legislators in identifying constituency needs.
8. Maintain risk-based anti-corruption enforcement. Criminal investigation and prosecution should focus on evidence of deliberate misconduct, while administrative and technical deficiencies should receive proportionate corrective action. This approach reduces the risk of treating every project failure as corruption.
9. Use independent needs assessment and project prioritisation. The 2025 stakeholder evidence identifying poor needs assessment as a challenge indicates that project selection should be linked to documented community needs and development priorities. This can improve value for money and reduce politically driven duplication.

Conclusion

This study examined constituency projects and corruption within Nigeria's budgetary process using documentary evidence covering the Fourth Republic and giving particular attention to recent project-tracking, transparency and procurement developments. The analysis shows that constituency projects have a legitimate developmental rationale and should not be characterised as inherently corrupt. At the same time, documentary evidence identifies recurring accountability and implementation problems, including procurement irregularities, underperformance, missing or incomplete outputs, conflicts of interest, weak monitoring and information gaps.

The study's principal analytical contribution is the distinction between allegations, documented irregularities, implementation weaknesses and institutional weaknesses. This

distinction prevents the overstatement of evidence. A delayed or abandoned project may indicate implementation failure without proving corruption, whereas a documented procurement irregularity, recovery or enforcement action provides a stronger basis for a corruption-related interpretation. The evidence also indicates that several vulnerabilities associated with constituency projects are shared by other public projects.

The findings therefore support a conditional institutional explanation. Information asymmetry, political incentives and weak institutional enforcement can create opportunities for misuse of public resources, but the existence of those conditions does not establish that corruption occurred in every project. Recent reforms in procurement, digital transparency and anti-corruption tracking provide mechanisms through which these risks can be reduced.

The study recommends project-level disclosure, stronger physical verification, clearer accountability responsibilities, transparent procurement, integrated digital tracking, timely corrective action and evidence-based enforcement. These measures are directed at the specific weaknesses identified in the documentary evidence. Future research should complement the present qualitative approach with project-level quantitative datasets comparing constituency and non-constituency projects on cost, completion, procurement outcomes, monitoring findings and enforcement actions. Such research would permit stronger comparative and causal conclusions than are possible from the present documentary design.

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Limitations

The study is based on published literature and documentary sources and, therefore, does not estimate the prevalence of corruption across all constituency projects. The documentary evidence is also influenced by the purposive nature of some official tracking exercises. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as an evidence-based synthesis of documented governance risks rather than as a statistical estimate or a causal test.