

Constituency Projects, Legislators' Constituency Performance and Prospects for Re-Election in Nigeria

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Article DOI:

10.48028/iiprds/ijsrhlir.v6.i1.12

Keywords:

Legislatures, Re-election,
Constituency project, Substantive representation,
Zonal intervention projects,
Constituency Development Fund

Abstract

One of the challenges threatening the institutionalization of the legislature in Nigeria following the return to democracy in 1999 is the inability of experienced legislators to win re-election. This has resulted in low institutional memory, incompetence of the legislatures, a slow rate of membership maturity, and the general development of legislative duties. Extant literature associates this development with the nature and character of party politics, machine politics-godfatherism syndrome, elite clientelism, power of incumbency, and intra-party squabbles. This study examines the electoral stage at which an incumbent legislator exits the parliament as a result of a disconnection between the legislature and his constituency. Relying on Hana Pitkin's typology of representation, with specific attention on substantive representation which shows that representatives' actions and the interests of the represented are the most crucial element of representation, the study makes case for the role of implementation of constituency project or zonal intervention projects in the legislators' zone through the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as a core determinant of the re-election bids of the parliamentarians. Data was generated through a secondary source. Documents and materials in which facts about the implementation of constituency projects are cited are consulted. More specifically, evidence from the budget tracker, a statistical bulletin for budget implementation, is also used for a comparative analysis of budget implementation in Nigeria. Logical argument and inference were also used in interpreting the non-statistical data.

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Background to the Study

As one of the irreducible minimum elements of liberal democracy, the election serves as an orderly means of leadership succession and conferment of political authority and legitimacy to state actors (Adejumobi, 2000). In contradistinction to the Hellenistic tradition which prioritized the deliberative method, ie the assemblage of people who discuss and take public decisions, liberal democracy through periodic elections confines the people to participate in selecting a body that takes full responsibility for the public policy. Theorists of liberal democracy contend that “democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them” or as Huntington observed, “the most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes,”. (Schumpeter, 2003 & Huntington, 1991). This suggests that the only preoccupation of the people is the production and reproduction of government or a body of men who produces a national executive because according to Schumpeter, “democracy is the rule of the politicians.... And if we wish to face facts squarely, we must recognize that politics will unavoidably be a career”. (Schumpeter, cited Nwosu, 2012, p. 13). As career politicians acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote, they voted to become the representatives of a certain constituency.

Parliaments around the world lie at the heart of democracy because legislatures are the most important organs of political representation. Strong parliaments have proved to be blessings to democratic consolidation in developing countries (Vliet, 2014). Nigeria's democratic experiment has indeed proved very resilient in the election and re-election processes of the legislatures. From 1999 when the fourth republic kicked off, Nigeria has conducted six presidential elections and six National Assembly elections simultaneously and is getting ready to conduct the seventh one come February 25th, 2023. There is one significant trend that characterizes all the elections from 2003 till date: While some of the members of the National Assembly won re-election to the Houses, others fail to win re-election. For instance, in the just concluded primary elections held across the country for the election of the candidates for the forthcoming presidential and National Assembly members on the 25th of February, 2023, some ranking senators and Honourable Members failed the party re-nomination. In aggregate, 31 senators including 17 APC senators, 12 PDP senators, 1 NNPP senator, and 1 YPP senator are not going to be reelected. Among them, 22 of the retirees are seeking other offices other than the Senate. There are also 3 vacant seats that should be filled by new candidates as a result of resignation to occupy other offices. Apart from resignation, 20 incumbents (12 APC senators and 8 PDP senators) lost the party primary, but instructively, (2 APC senators and 1 PDP senator) after defecting to a new party (1 APC and 1 PDP) won the party flag (Wikipedia).

A large body of literature argues that the high turnover of members of the parliament in African politics is not unconnected to the supremacy of party leadership that characterize some African countries. Taking Tanzania as a typical example, Weghorst (2015) contends that the ruling party can discretionally deny an incumbent a returning ticket if he has consistently not attended to legislative duties in order to protect the constituency from

other rival parties. Following this line of argument, Demarest (2022) also argues that the prevalence of partisan and elite clientelism constrains and limits the ideal legislator-voter ties that ought to have been explored during the reelection process. Related to the party factors dictating the reelection bids of members of the parliament is the influence of some big men who work through the party to foist certain candidates on the party. These godfathers bless the candidates of their choice with money, networks, connections, and electoral votes. In appreciation of these gestures, public funds meant for public development are used to service the egos of the big men. Recalcitrant members of the parliament who refuse to oil the wheels of the godfathers are in most cases denied reelection tickets no matter the contribution of the member to legislature duties (Omotola, 2010). Udegbumam and Onwunyi (2020) zeroed their mind on the role of the incumbency factor in the reelection bids of the members of the parliaments. According to them, in a polity where the managers of state apparatus have unrestricted access to the state fund and determine the appointment of electoral officers as well as being responsible for the general security of the electoral infrastructure, any candidate anointed by the incumbent is as good as having won the election. Waxing historically, they showcased how Tafawa Balewa got elected in 1960 and got reelected in 1964 and Obasanjo elected in 1999 got reelected in 2003 and both of them paid more than usual attention to the reelection of members of the parliament who worked with them. There is no doubt that party structures and incumbency power play a prominent role in the reelection bids of the members of the parliament. Apart from providing already-made structures and immediate funds that can be deployed to influence voters, party politics throws up verifiable manifestos that candidates can rely upon in convincing the voters about their reelection bids. In a polity where parties in power have performed above average, it can be a reference point in inducing voters' decisions. Nonetheless, there have been occasions where individual personalities are chosen by voters other than the party. Again, despite the state power at the disposal of the former incumbent president Goodluck Jonathan, he failed his reelection bid and other members of the National Assembly that depended on his state power for reelection.

Other scholars associate the chances of the reelection of the members of the parliament with the degree to which they have influenced the development of their constituency. Benson (2019) contends that constituency project has served as a redistributive policy tool and inclusive process of consultation with constituents who have the responsibility to identify the areas of need in their constituency. The result has been the creation of channels of input for the local citizens and the fostering of cooperation with representatives which enable them to respond adequately to the local development needs. Udefuna, Jumare and Adebayo (2013) are of the view that the constituency project when properly managed can bring about even development and encourage popular participation in local politics. The central argument of this work is that legislators who consistently make a conscious effort in influencing the citing of zonal intervention projects in their various constituencies have high prospects of being re-elected by the constituencies in Nigeria. This occurs regardless of the shenanigans of intra-party squabbles or the incumbent factors that may likely deny the serving parliamentarian the

returning ticket. This argument is based on qualitative and statistical evidence found in bulletins dedicated to publishing empirical facts about the state of budget implementation in Nigeria. The study also places the Nigerian experience in a comparative perspective, with particular attention to the re-election of the federal lawmaker's vis-a-vis their constituency attraction.

Clarification of Concepts

- (i) Constituency project (Zonal Intervention Projects)
- (ii) Legislators' Constituency Performance
- (iii) Re-election Prospects

Constituency Project (Zonal Intervention Projects)

For Awofoso and Irabor (2020), a constituency is conceptualized as an electoral unit wherein a citizen's vote is counted for the purpose of electing a political representative. With this conceptualization. This view affirms the representative responsibility of the parliamentarians as the focus of providing constituency services. Dagago (2022), on his part, frames constituency projects as "those projects nominated by federal lawmakers to extend the dividends of democratic government to their constituencies, to bring about development across the country". The former speaker of the House of Representatives, Yakubu Dogara noted that constituency projects are those developmental projects cited in the constituencies of Honourable members of the State Houses of Assemblies, Members of the House of Representatives, or Senators by various ministries, Departments, and Agencies of government as appropriated in the budget of the federation or state (Dogara, 2016 cited Awofoso and Irabor, 2020). Following this line of thought, Orimoguje (2015) conceptualized it as all those projects that are conceived, designed, and executed within a legislative constituency with the collaboration, input, or influence of the legislators representing that particular constituency in the legislature and such project is funded from the state budget or the national budget.

The idea of ZIP owes its conception and emergence in Nigeria polity to the desire of the state to reach the local population with the dividends of democracy after Nigeria returned to democracy practice in 1999. It did not start with the nomenclature ZIP but with Constituency Development Fund (CDF). People were concerned about the modality of transferring democratic dividends to the local people. At such an early period, it came as Constituency Development Fund. The proponent of the project contended that the non-development of the local areas by the federal government is a result of the unfair revenue allocation formula adopted by the federal government. The revenue allocation formula awards 52.6% to the central government, the 36 states 26.72%, and the local government 20.60%. They, therefore, suggest that Constituency Development Fund would ensure even development in all the local areas. Following this line of argument, the Legislatures requested the then President for the approval of the project as a means of reaching their local constituencies. With an executive order, the president approved the sum of 5 million nairas each to the 109 senators and 3million naira each to all the 306 House of Representative members (Benson, 2019).

During the period of Obasanjo's administration, the projects were mainly restricted to small projects like water and rural electrification but after some time, other projects such as the construction of educational and health facilities, construction of rural roads, bursaries, and other infrastructural development were included. The amount allocated for projects also continued to increase over the years. For instance, it was stated that between the period 2004 and 2013, N900 Billion was allocated to the CDF project at the National Assembly. This makes the Nigerian CDF one of the most expensive in the world as the allocations from inception put together run into billions of dollars (Benson, 2019). Nevertheless, the CDF was changed to Zonal Intervention Project (ZIP) in 2016 by the Executive arm of the government. This is a result of the intrigues and controversies that characterize the CDF in Nigeria. The legislators were stripped of the power to award contracts and were only required to consult with the constituents and identify the preferred projects for inclusion in the budget by the executive. After budget approval, the appropriate executive agencies will identify the contractor to execute the projects and award the contracts, supervise the payments and ensure execution (Asimiyu and Adebola, 2019). Under this development, N100 billion naira was earmarked for 2515 constituency development projects across the six geopolitical zones. This was included as a capital supplement in the appropriation budget of the federal government. One major significant difference in the change of the nomenclature from CDF to ZIP is that it now appears that which geopolitical zones get what and the amount of what is secured is at the discretion of the executive arm of the government instead of the legislatures and there is also the cessation of uniform budgetary allocation to the constituency project.

Legislators Constituency Performance

The functions of the legislatures are dependent on the nature of assignments given to them by their individual countries. It is country-specific. In Nigeria, the legislature's major assignment is to make laws for the entire country and perform oversight functions to different kinds of a parastatal under the executive arm of the government. Whether at the local level of politics, where they serve as the councilors, or at the State and Federal Houses of Assembly where they serve as either Senators or Honorable Members of the House of Representatives, they complement the executive in the day-to-day running of the government. Laski (1992) captures this sentiment when he observes that the legislatures lay down the general rules of society and makes law for the good governance of a state. In the making of these laws, they may originate as private member bills or from the executive arm of the government (Duruji, 2017). Apart from law-making, legislators also engage in other varieties of people-oriented activities such as ensuring that their constituency gets what belongs to it. In fact, constituency performance is touted as one of the key legislative functions (Eulau and Karps, 1977). In an ideal democratic setup, the legislatures devote some amount of their time and resources to responding to phone calls, and emails, entertaining visitors, and giving attention to issues of importance in their various constituencies (Asimiyu and Adebola, 2019).

Apart from the official constituency projects, some parliamentarians resort to their private purse in the provision of welfare packages and social responsibilities such as

empowerment schemes, health services, digging of boreholes, education support, and assistance in the procurement of visas for those intending to check out from the country in his constituency. According to Akinderu-Fatai (2016 cited in Asimiyu and Adebola, 2019), the resort to private purses by the legislatures in the provision of these welfare packages become necessary because of the fact that not all listed projects for inclusion in the budget would be executed by the executive. Secondly, as a result of not being in possession of all the facts, the constituents will blame the legislators for not pursuing their interests or even claim that funds have been diverted to private purses. More importantly, the perception of the constituents determines the re-election chances of the representative.

Re-Election Prospects

The re-election of the members of the parliament is the action of the election of a person or persons for a further term of office. The election and reelection of members of the Nigerian legislators are dependent on their qualifications, performance in the office, and other political intrigues. Section 65 of the 1999 constitution as amended provides the background for the qualifications of the legislators in order to be elected. For instance, members of the House of Representatives are expected to possess the following requisite qualifications:

- (i) He/she must be a citizen of Nigeria and must attain the age of 30 years
- (ii) He/she has been educated up to at least school certificate level or its equivalent and
- (iii) He/she is a member of a political party and is sponsored by that political party.

The inference from the forgoing development is the no tolerance of independent candidates and the indispensability of political parties in both election and reelection of party members. In a polity where there is much emphasis on rent-seeking, stakeholders of political parties see sponsoring party candidates in elective offices as investments with profitable yields in the future. Candidates who understand the terrains and oil in the hands of the elders of the party stakeholders are likely to enjoy renomination of the party and are also likely to enjoy the entire party structures, thus enhancing the party bearers' prospects of reelection.

Despite this development, the degree to which a legislator attracts constituency projects in his local communities has on many occasions enhanced their reelection chances. To this effect, Atairet and Ibanga (2021) observe that every constituency expects government presence in their environments and this expectation is part of the demands of the electorate from their representatives to bring social infrastructures to their constituency. Representatives have responded to these yearnings by attracting federal presence in their domain and this has enhanced their opportunity of being reelected. Benson (2019) also shows that when representatives attract projects in their communities, it shows that the constituents are connected with their representatives and that they champion their interests and have a high chance of being reelected. This is because constituents want to be represented by a person they can trust, a person whom they see often and who is often

open to their concern and whose assurance they can trust. He, therefore, suggests that when there is a lack of connection between the represented and the representatives, it always leads to the decline of any political system, with detrimental consequences to the reelection bids of the legislators.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the theoretical framework of representation as enunciated by Hana Pitkin. Before Hana Pitkin adopts representation theory, the genealogy of the scholars who applied the theses of the theory of representation includes Thomas Hobbes, Edmund Burke, Max Weber, Miller and Stokes, and a host of other scholars, but in different ways. Thomas Hobbes addressed the issue of representation in his social contract body of thought. According to him, dissatisfied with the nature of life in the state of nature, people agreed to delegate the authority to act on behalf of others to a group of men acting on behalf of the whole people. In other words, the action and inaction of the representatives are endorsed by the represented. She noted thus: "Thomas Hobbes develops a quite peculiar complex of representation when he maintains that a man is a representative insofar as he has been authorized, that is, given the right to act, but this definition is an incomplete account of what representation means (Pitkin, 1964, p.902). Benson (2019) critiqued this kind of representation as inadequate because, although the people are represented, they cannot lay claim on their representatives because they had committed themselves totally in advance to the representatives. Burkes's idea of representation is that of unattached interest. He believes that since the entire society is made of the masses and the elite, the elite who understand what is good for the people should be allowed to represent the people, owing to the judgment of their consciences. His view unwittingly undermines both the interests and positions of ordinary people. Rehfeld (2009) observes that this kind of representation serves as an outright promotion of an Aristocratic form of government, which, in most cases, marginalizes the interests of the represented. Both Mar Weber, Miller, and Stokes reflect such elitist views in their analysis of representations.

Nonetheless, Hana Pitkin delineates four typologies of representation that shed light on how the representatives interact with their represented in their various constituencies. According to her, there are four distinct but interrelated dimensions of representation, and they are formal representation, which refers to the institutional rules and procedures by which the representatives are chosen. The second is descriptive representation. This draws attention to the compositional similarities between the representatives and the represented. In this instance, men will be expected to represent men, women for women, blacks for blacks, and those who have similar experiences are also expected to represent the same. The third identified is substantive representation or responsiveness. At this juncture, the actions of the representatives and the interests of the represented are interspersed. And fourthly, symbolic representation deals with the perception and feelings of the represented on whether he is properly and effectively represented (Pitkin, 1967, cited in Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). Among them, substantive representation is the interest of this study because it provides the opportunity for the representatives to

be held accountable for the degree of their responsiveness to their various constituencies. This day of reckoning is normally taken when the representatives canvass for votes for re-election. Inherent in the theorization of Pitkin is that representatives are the following three core things:

- (i) Representatives mean acting for other people's interests.
- (ii) Representatives mean a responsive action to ameliorate the sufferings of the represented.

Application of the Theory

By conceptualizing representation from the perspective of the interest of the represented, it shows that the interest of citizens should be the fulcrum and center of representation. On many occasions, the identified needs of the constituents in Nigeria have always been the provision of social services like pipe-borne water, roads, health facilities, rural electrification, empowerment of the population to engage in the informal economy, finding job placements, and the overall issues that concern the survival and livelihood of the local people. Oftentimes, any legislator who identifies with these needs is no doubt projecting the interest of the populace. When concrete action is taken for the realization of these needs, the representative is said to be responsive to the represented in the real sense of it. The provision of various Zonal Intervention Projects in Nigeria by the executive arm of government, as identified by the Nigerian legislators, is a gallant effort in that regard, this is despite the perennial challenges of corruption and uncompleted projects that mark these projects since their introduction.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis will utilize the 2021 Zonal Intervention Projects in 32 states of the federation and six geopolitical zones of the federation. See the accompanying tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: 2021 Zonal Intervention Projects across the 32 states of the federation

States	Completed projects	Ongoing projects	Abandoned projects	Yet to commence projects
Anambra	43	9	0	7
Ebonyi	6	2	0	0
Enugu	33	12	1	23
Imo	10	9	0	1
Akwa-Ibom	10	9	0	1
Cross-River	11	3	0	0
Bayelsa	20	1	1	14
Delta	36	1	0	7
Edo	55	10	0	2
Rivers	7	1	0	21
Lagos	34	2	0	3
Ogun	51	14	0	6
Oyo	24	3	2	22
Ondo	37	10	1	0
Osun	26	0	0	14
Ekiti	23	1	0	17
Nassarawa	24	4	1	3
Niger	31	0	0	0
Kogi	12	2	0	15
Benue	12	9	3	7
Pleatue	15	8	0	23
Kwara	23	3	0	8
Abuja	20	1	0	9
Kano	14	0	0	14
Sokoto	25	0	2	3
Kaduna	34	4	3	5
Katsina	10	2	0	19
Kebbi	51	1	1	2
Bauchi	36	4	0	4
Taraba	12	1	0	8
Gombe	27	4	0	6
Adamawa	29	1	0	6

Source: Extracted and prepared by the author from the 2021 Constituency Project Report by Budget Tracker.

Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Geopolitical Zonal Intervention Project in Nigeria, 2021

Zones	Completed projects	Ongoing projects	Abandoned projects	Yet to commence projects	Total
SE	92	32	1	31	156
SS	150	13	2	57	215
SW	23	1	0	17	41
NC	137	27	1	42	210
NW	134	7	4	29	176
NE	104	10	0	23	137

Source: Extracted and prepared by the authors from the 2021 Constituency Project Report by Budget Tracker.

In the above table, the data shows that all the Nigerian legislators attracted and completed 802 projects, abandoned 16 projects, and had 122 ongoing projects and 244 yet-to-be-commenced projects as of July 2022. On a state-to-state comparison, Edo state outperformed others in terms of completion of the project. They had an overall number of 67 projects tracked, and it was found that 55 projects were completed, while none of the projects were abandoned. It was also discovered that there are 10 ongoing projects and 2 to be commenced. On assessment, Edo had a 72.2% of the high rate of completion of the project. Nevertheless, the Budget tracker observed numerous irregularities in documentation, unspecified project locations, the incapability of assigned agencies to execute projects, and a lack of awareness by the citizens concerning budgetary provisions. Ogun state also had a commendable performance in terms of project completion and did not leave any project unattended. In southeastern Nigeria, Anambra State had 43 projects completed out of 59 projects tracked, with none of the projects left unattended. However, 63 % of the ZIP was used as empowerment to party loyalists, and so there is every likelihood of the money being diverted into the private pockets instead of the general public. Niger state also had 31 of their projects completed with zero on abandoned projects.

When this analysis is projected from the lens of a geopolitical perspective, it shows that the South-South had the overall best result in the completion of the budgeted project. This is followed by north-central and northwest, respectively. Others are northeast, southeast, and southwest. Surprisingly, the northeast performed better than the southwest, given the prevalence of insecurity caused by the Bok-Haran insurgency. It is also ironic that the northeast is the only geopolitical zone that did not have an abandoned project in the entire of 2021.

Implications of Project Attraction and Completion to the Re-elections of the Legislators in Nigeria.

The study has consistently maintained that there is a correlation between the attraction of ZIP and the reelection bids of the legislators. In Enugu state, where there is perceived nonperformance of the legislators, Senator Ayogu Eze, representing Enugu North senatorial constituency, is not returning to the red chambers. He was alleged to have stepped down for the incumbent governor to proceed to the senate, but the perceived body language of the people is that he has performed woefully and does not deserve to go back to the Senate. Therefore, his inability to attract any verifiable ZIP to his community is a factor in his retirement from the Senate. As mentioned at the outset, 31 Senators, including 17 APC Senators, are retiring from the Senate, 22 of whom are seeking the office of the Governor in their respective states. Nevertheless, there are about 20 incumbent Senators (12 APC Senators and 8 PDP Senators) who lost their primary elections to new entrants in their parties. And it is not surprising because some of them have yet to commence ZIP littered in their constituencies. For example, in Ogun state, there were 6 yet to be commenced ZIP, and particularly in Ogun West, Tolu Odebiyi (APC) lost renomination to Solomon Olamilekan Adeola. In Ondo state, where there was no clean slate in terms of project completion, Patrick Ayo Akinyelure (PDP) lost renomination to

Ifedayo Adedipe, and Nicholas Tofowomo (PDP) also lost to Agboola Ajayi. In Oyo state, out of 51 ZIPs, the legislators could only ensure the execution of 22, and by reelection time, Mohammed Kola Balogun of Oyo south lost renomination to Sharafadeen Alli (APC). In Kaduna State, where 46 ZIP was budgeted, but the Honorable members only ensured the implementation of 34 of the projects, with abandoned projects littered everywhere, and Danjuma Laah (PDP) paid dearly for that as he lost renomination to Sunday Marshal Katung. So we can safely conclude that there is a very big correlation between the non-returning of these senators to their various chambers and their abysmal performance in the various constituencies.

Conclusion

The study began with the centrality of the legislatures in the practice and consolidation of democracy around the world. Apart from the President of a country that is elected by the people, the legislators are the immediate custodians of the people's choice and should therefore connect the people to the governance mechanism of the state. The study observes that one of the practical mechanisms adopted by the Nigerian legislatures to reach the local people is through the introduction of the Zonal Intervention Project which kicked off as the Constituency Development Fund. Although the legislators were stripped of the responsibility of conceptualizing and implementing the project to conceptualizing and suggesting areas of need, the program still goes a long way in bridging the gap in infrastructures in local areas. Relying on Hana Pitkin's reconceptualization of representation, the study argued made a case for consistent implementation of ZIP as it is the most responsive manner of representing one's constituency. While some legislators played ostrich in the implementation of the attracted ZIP, they paid dearly during the renomination of a return ticket. The study, therefore, recommends the following: there should be an increment in the budgetary allocation of ZIP. Adequate publicity should be mounted in various constituencies about the ZIP attracted as many of the citizens are not even aware that those things are attracted talk more of taking advantage of the program. The state should also pay more attention to the degree to which those entrusted with the implementation have done the jobs given to them.

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