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# POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND THE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISES IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA POSTAL SERVICE (NIPOST)

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## ABSTRACT

*Public enterprises play a critical role in the socio-economic development of many developing countries like Sub-Saharan Africa. These organizations are often at the forefront of providing essential services and facilitating national cohesion. However, enterprises face a myriad of challenges, including economic shocks and governance problems. This paper undertakes a case study of the effect of political instability on the service efficiency, administrative capacity, and financial performance of public enterprises. The study focuses on the Nigeria postal service (NIPOST) in the period 2015-2024. The paper uses a mixed-sequential methodology to test the theoretical framework of Public Choice theory and Neopatrimonialism. The research question guides the paper: how does political instability affect the operational performance of public enterprises? A case study of NIPOST evaluates the effect of political instability on public enterprises using audit reports, budget approval data, and service performance indicators at the geopolitical zone level. The analysis reveals that political and administrative instabilities in Nigeria significantly influence the capital budget, strategic planning, and operational efficiency of NIPOST. The paper finds that frequent ministerial changes, policy inconsistency, and patronage practices undermine enterprises' ability to deliver on time and cost-effective services to the masses. For instance, changes in Postmaster-General and Postmaster-General General positions impede the effective implementation of the digital post office plan and postal banking. Moreover, parliamentary and ministerial oversight of the enterprise's tariffs and commercial activities reduces its competitiveness in the market. Overall, the paper recommends insulating public enterprises from political pressures and enhancing autonomy in decision-making to improve operational performance.*

***Keywords: Political Instability, Public Enterprises, Nigeria Postal Service (NIPOST), Public Sector Performance, Governance, Bureaucratic Turnover, Commercialization.***

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Public enterprises (PEs) or state-owned enterprises (SOEs) are significant phenomena in the political economy of developing countries. Typically established to address key infrastructure, correct market failures, ensure accessibility of essential public goods, and contribute to national socio-economic integration, public enterprises act as the government's implementers (Ije & Momoh, 2025; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). In post-colonial African states such as Nigeria, the role of public enterprises is further compounded by their designed role as instruments of sovereignty, national unity, and mass employment (Nnaji *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, public enterprises have consistently operated in a context of severe operational inefficiencies, financial losses, infrastructural neglect, and an inability to adapt to market demands (Ivuoma *et al.*, 2025; Oladosu *et al.*, 2024). While conventional literature often attributes the root causes of such administrative failures to internal governance issues, technological and financial limitations, or capital inadequacy, a closer inspection reveals that the effectiveness of state-owned entities is inherently dependent on the socio-political environment in which it operates (Akinlo *et al.*, 2022; Obalade *et al.*, 2021).

Specifically, in Nigeria, political instability in the form of government transitions, policy inconsistencies, partisan clientelism, ethno-regional bargaining, executive overreach, and high-level turnover acts as a major driving force behind public administration failures (Fagbemi & Fajingbesi, 2024; Tawiah *et al*., 2022). Instead of operating as independent corporate entities guided by objective economic principles, public enterprises in Nigeria are subject to rampant political rent-seeking and ad-hoc administrative interventions (Isah *et al*., 2024; Osuma *et al*., 2024). One such illustration of the precarious position of public enterprises in Nigeria is embodied by the experience of the Nigeria Postal Service (NIPOST). Established by Act 41 of 1992, the mandate of NIPOST is to provide reliable postal, dispatch, and communication services to the Nigerian federation. With an extensive network of over 1,000 post offices and agencies spread across all 774 Local Government Areas, NIPOST has struggled to remain relevant in the face of the digital revolution (Chukwuma & Okafor, 2025; Onibon *et al*., 2022). While international counterparts such as the United States Postal Service (USPS), Deutsche Post DHL, Kenya Post, and others transformed themselves into multi-billion conglomerates offering a wide range of logistics, e-commerce, and techno-financial services, NIPOST continues to suffer from infrastructural decay, poor service quality, loss of revenues, and employee apathy (Adiele, 2024; Onibon *et al*., 2022). A major reason for the observed institutional shortcomings of NIPOST stems from the fact that it is subject to severe political instabilities and policy flip-flopping. Throughout the past two decades, the organizational sustainability of NIPOST has been severely compromised due to frequent leadership shake-ups, partisan overreach, delayed board appointments, and policy contradictions (Chukwuma & Okafor, 2025; Ivuoma *et al*., 2025). Several key corporate reforms, including the National Postal Reform Bill, partial commercialization measures, address verification processes, and the creation of the NIPOST Property and Development Company have been repeatedly reversed or abandoned amidst political transitions and ministerial appointments (Isah *et al*., 2024; Oladosu *et al*., 2024). As such, NIPOST emerges as a paradigmatic example of how political instability can adversely affect the functioning of state-owned-enterprises. This paper attempts to explore the complex nexus between political instability and the performance of public enterprises in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper focuses on the experience of the Nigeria Postal Service, and tries to address the following research questions: 1. To what extent has political turnover and ministerial interference impacted the management and administrative capacity of the Nigeria Postal Service? 2. How do policy inconsistencies affect the infrastructural and capitalization agenda of the Nigeria Postal Service? 3. What are the operational and financial implications of such political instabilities for the functioning of Nigeria Postal Service between 2015 and 2024? By illuminating the theoretical and empirical aspects of the public administration-political economy nexus, the paper tries to contribute to the on-going discourse on corporate governance, commercialization, and insulation policies for public enterprises in developing countries.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *2.1 Conceptual Clarifications*

To establish a rigorous analytical foundation, three central concepts must be clearly defined: political instability, public enterprises, and public sector operational performance.

#### *2.1.1 Political Instability*

In administrative and political science literature, political instability has been variously attributed to the potential for changes in government, personnel, and policies as well as those of general chaos within a given sovereign state (Akinlo *et al*., 2022; Fagbemi & Fajingbesi, 2024). In public administration, political instability is manifested in not only unconstitutional changes of government but also policy oscillations, corruption, frequent ministerial appointments and dismissals, organizational restructuring, and related maladies (Obalade *et al*., 2021; Osuma *et al*., 2024). It is a matter of concern that in a politically unstable environment, appointments to public posts are made on political considerations rather than professional competence, resulting in ad hoc and risky public administration (Tawiah *et al*., 2022).

### *2.1.2 Public Enterprises*

Public enterprises (PEs) also called State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) are those entities where the government exercises a degree of direct control over them or in which it holds a controlling interest or major shareholding, and in which commercial-industrial services are provided (OECD, 2020, 2021). These enterprises operate in a space that is between a government institution and a market economy. They are expected to deliver social outcomes and be financially viable and efficient (Ije & Momoh, 2025; Nnaji *et al.*, 2022). Public enterprises in Nigeria are involved in all spheres of human activity, for example, in the Nigerian energy sector, communication sector, transport sector and many others, and perform the functions of implementing state planning (Ivuoma *et al.*, 2025; Okolie & Udom, 2023).

### *2.1.3 Public Enterprise Performance*

The assessment of the accomplishment of public enterprise objectives calls for a multi-level approach that simultaneously considers financial accomplishment indicators (e.g., income production, cost reimbursement, capital yield) and service accomplishment criteria (e.g., operability efficiency, accessibility standard, infrastructural maintenance, client gratification, and technical innovativeness) (OECD, 2022; Oladosu *et al.*, 2024; Onibon *et al.*, 2022). In public administration research, performance is regarded as an agency's ability to perform its mandated functions efficiently, ensure the continuous capitalization process, and transform its service delivery system constantly according to the need of its users (Adejuwon *et al.*, 2024; Chukwuma & Okafor, 2025).

### *2.2 Theoretical Framework*

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical paradigms: Public Choice Theory and the Theory of Neopatrimonialism.

Public Choice Theory, developed by Buchanan and Tullock, employs economic principles to understand the choices and actions of political and bureaucratic officials. Their perspective holds that politicians, bureaucrats, and public enterprise managers act out of self-interest, rent-seeking, and power maximization rather than the disinterested 'public interest' (Buchanan & Tullock, 1962; Ivuoma *et al.*, 2025). When applied to the operations of public enterprises in Nigeria, the Public Choice Theory can explain how politicians and supervising ministers utilize public enterprises as fiefdoms to award patronage, large contracts, and regional influence (Tawiah *et al.*, 2022). As such, political and policy-related changes in agencies such as NIPOST tend to be informed by self-interest and not objective evaluation of the performance implications (Isah *et al.*, 2024). In tandem with the Public Choice Theory, Neopatrimonialism is an appropriate theoretical perspective for analyzing administrative practices in African post-colonial states. Neopatrimonialism is premised on the idea that beneath the surface of legal-rational bureaucracy, African politics is characterized by informal patronage-based client networks that dominate resource distribution and decision-making in the public sector (Fagbemi & Fajingbesi, 2024; Nnaji *et al.*, 2022). In the context of the NIPOST, neopatrimonialism takes center stage in the appointment of board members on a political patronage basis, the unilateral removal of chief executives by new ministers, and the interference in procurement by politicians. The two theoretical perspectives can be integrated into an analysis of the impact of political instability on public enterprises. Political instability promotes neopatrimonial and self-seeking bureaucratic practices that undermine the ability of public enterprises to deliver quality services and achieve their policy objectives. Political elites are primarily interested in promoting their self-interest and political careers through clientelism and not the public interest.

### *2.3 Empirical Literature Review*

Extensive research has been carried out to establish the connection between governance policies, reforms, political environment, and the performance of state-owned enterprises in developing countries. Ije and Momoh (2025) assessed public enterprises and economic development in Nigeria and concluded that political weaknesses and corruption have characterized public enterprises as money suckers and not value for money. Nnaji *et al*. (2022) assessed the governance strategies in developing countries and concluded that for state-owned enterprises to perform consistently well, they must be free from political interference. Isah *et al*. (2024) examined policy reforms and strategies for curing public enterprises through privatization and commercialization. Their analysis of the impact of commercialization on public enterprises in Nigeria showed that the strategy is appropriate in influencing enterprises to act commercially. However, the researchers found that political leaders maintain control of enterprises through partial commercialization where the politicians are involved in decision-making processes. This is further supported by the findings of Oladosu *et al*. (2024) on the empirical evaluation of financial performance of partially commercialized public enterprises in Nigeria. The study revealed that the enterprises had faced a lot of challenges in terms of budget appropriation and allocations from ministries and authorities. Zakari and Ibeme (2023) and Umezu (2024) analyzed the effects of policy inconsistencies and instability in the power sector on the capital investment and performance of EEDC. The findings showed that the political instability, policy inconsistencies, and regulatory challenges in the power sector significantly affected the operations of the distributors. Onibon *et al*. (2022) assessed the implication of express parcel market developments on NIPOST. Although there is a great potential for modern parcel delivery companies to penetrate the Nigerian market, NIPOST has been facing some limitations in adopting the technologies required to meet the demands of the local market. Chukwuma and Okafor (2025) evaluated the communication efficiency of the Benin zone of NIPOST. The findings revealed that there were communication barriers in the operational activities, which affected the funding program of the agency. Adiele (2024) established the connection between employee motivation, political instability, and the performance of government agencies. The study found that political instability has adverse effects on the morale of public servants in various government agencies. However, the studies reviewed above do not address the effects of political instabilities on the operational activities and capital budget of NIPOST. Many researchers have analyzed the impact of privatization (Adejuwon *et al*., 2024) and the economic implications (Akinlo *et al*., 2022). However, there is a need to investigate the impact of political changes on the operations and capital budget of NIPOST. A number of the reviewed articles were theoretical, and there is a need for more empirical studies to fill the research gap.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods case study research design was adopted for this study. The design involved a qualitative administrative history analysis of the agency's policies and a quantitative examination of operational and financial trends. The subject of this study was selected due to its wide jurisdiction, public utility, and susceptibility to political leadership changes. Both primary and secondary data were collected for the study, with 2015 to 2024 as the selected period. Secondary data were culled from the agency's annual reports, the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy's policy directives, the Ministry of Finance budget implementation reports, and international studies (OECD, 2020, 2021, 2022). Primary qualitative data consisted of key informant interviews (KIIs) with 24 senior administrative officers, zonal managers, and trade union representatives. The respondents were purposively selected from four (4) selected NIPOST administrative zones namely Abuja Head Office, Lagos, Enugu, and Kano Zones. Descriptive statistics, trend analysis and, comparative index ranking were employed for the quantitative analysis of budget appropriation, fund utilization, project implementation rate, and turnaround time. Thematic content analysis was performed on qualitative responses to key issues including leadership turnover, policy flip-flop, political patronage, and operational impasse. The study established content validity through expert validation and relied on triangulation between primary and secondary data sources to establish research credibility.

## 4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

To evaluate the empirical impact of political instability on NIPOST, this section presents operational and budgetary data spanning the 2015–2024 period, contextualized by major political and administrative leadership transitions.

### *4.1 Administrative Turnover and Leadership Instability in NIPOST*

A closer examination of the history of the organization reveals that between 2015 and 2024, there has been a significant level of turnover in leadership at both ministerial and executive management levels. Table 4.1.1 below shows the tenure of the Postmasters-General (PMG) together with ministerial changes and developments in policies.

**Table 4.1.1 NIPOST Leadership Transitions, Ministerial Oversight, and Major Policy Decisions (2015–2024)**

| Year Span | Supervising Minister / Ministry | Postmaster-General (PMG) Status | Primary Reform Initiative Proposed | Policy Status / Outcome |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2015–2016 | Adebayo Shittu (Min. of Comm.) | Moluwase J. (Acting) / Bisi Adegbuyi (Appointed) | National Postal Reform Bill & Modernization | Bill stalled in National Assembly; corporate restructuring paused. |
| 2016–2019 | Adebayo Shittu (Min. of Comm.) | Bisi Adegbuyi | Postal Commercialization, Digital Address Verification | Partial implementation; heavily disrupted by budget delays. |
| 2019–2022 | Isa Ali Pantami (Min. of Comm. & Digital Econ.) | Ismail Adebayo Adewusi (Suspended/Removed) | NIPOST Property Co. & Electronic Stamp Duty | Inter-agency feud with FIRS; leadership removed amidst political rift. |
| 2022–2023 | Isa Ali Pantami (Min. of Comm. & Digital Econ.) | Sunday Adepoju | Postal Banking & Microfinance License | Abrupt termination of board; strategic initiatives frozen. |
| 2023–2024 | Bosun Tijani (Min. of Comm., Innovation & Digital Econ.) | Tola Odeyemi | Digital Transformation & Logistics Hub Restructuring | Protests by labor unions; realignment of organizational structure. |

*Source: Compiled by Authors from Field Survey and Public Data (2024).*

As depicted in Table 4.1.1, there were five instances of changes in the leadership of NIPOST in one decade. Indeed, in almost all cases, each change in the supervising ministerial personnel resulted in a disturbance or complete removal of the sitting Postmaster-General. For example, executive altercations over control of the highly lucrative Electronic Stamp Duty revenues and privatization of postal properties during 2019-2022 resulted in the sudden ousting of the PMG. Such phenomena can be used to illustrate the claims of Public Choice Theory and Neopatrimonialism that appointments and tenure of political executives in Nigerian state-owned enterprises are made on the basis of patronage and control rather than performance considerations (Ivuoma *et al.*, 2025; Tawiah *et al.*, 2022).

### *4.2 Comparative Analysis of Operational and Financial Metrics*

To assess the quantitative impact of this political instability on the primary mission of NIPOST, the performance indicators were divided into two categories: the period of political stability (2012-2015) and the period of political turnover (2016-2023). Figure 4.1 below represents the comparison of these two categories based on four core indicators, including delivery speed, revenue, maintenance, and adoption of digital services.

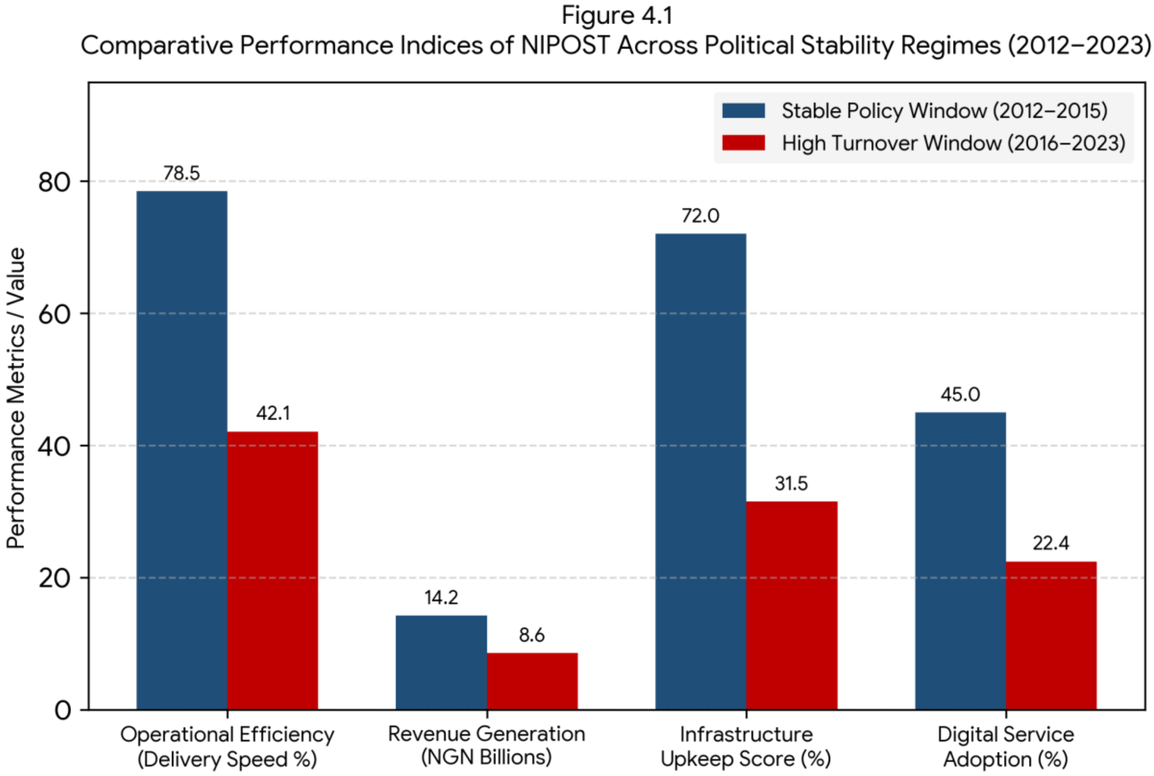


*Figure 4.1: Comparative Performance Indices of NIPOST Across Political Stability Regimes (2012–2023). Source: Authors' Analysis based on NIPOST Annual Reports.*

The evidence in Figure 4.1 illustrates a significant deterioration in all performance indicators during periods of intense political activity. For instance, the indicator for timely mail and parcel delivery within due time was at 78.5% during stable administrations, but it was only 42.1% during high-turnover years. A similar observation was made in infrastructure maintenance as the figure dropped from 72.0% to 31.5% (Chukwuma & Okafor, 2025). This implies the total neglect of rural post offices, breakdowns of sorting machines, and disrepair of transport fleets as a result of frequent changes in political administration which halts capital acquisition (Onibon *et al.*, 2022). In terms of financial performance, the data shows a significant decline in the amount of annual revenue generated as the figure dropped from an average of ₦14.2 billion during 2012–2015 to ₦8.6 billion between 2016 and 2023. In addition, key informants noted that every time there is a change in political administration, commercial partnerships are suspended, contracts for digital addressing verification are terminated, and capital provision by the Federal Ministry of Finance is delayed. These findings confirm those of Oladosu *et al.* (2024) and Isah *et al.* (2024) who observed that policy inconsistency denies partially commercialized public institutions the capital they need to achieve revenue self-sufficiency.

### *4.3 Qualitative Findings: Policy Flip-Flops and Capital Project Abandonment*

Qualitative thematic analysis of key informant interviews across NIPOST zonal headquarters highlighted three dominant structural mechanisms through which political instability cripples agency operations:

**1. Policy Flip-Flops and Strategic Abandonment:** Interview respondents uniformly noted that incoming Postmasters-General routinely discard the strategic plans of their predecessors to establish new, politically visible projects. For example, the 2017 'Digital Post Office' plan was shelved in 2020 in favor of a 'Postal Banking Initiative', which was subsequently abandoned in 2023 prior to implementation. A senior administrator in the Lagos Zone noted: 'We spend millions of Naira designing corporate transformation blueprints, only for a new minister to arrive, fire the leadership, and throw the entire document into the trash bin. We are constantly starting from scratch.'

**2. Patronage and Organizational Demoralization:** Political appointments to executive positions without postal sector experience have created severe friction between political appointees and career public servants. Staff unions expressed extreme frustration over political interference in promotions and recruitment, which has produced a demotivated workforce (Adiele, 2024). Operational staff reported working in dilapidated post offices lacking electricity, internet connectivity, or basic stationary, severely impairing service delivery (Chukwuma & Okafor, 2025).

**3. Regulatory Intrusion and Inter-Agency Feuds:** Political instability has rendered NIPOST vulnerable to statutory encroachments by other state agencies. A prime instance was the multi-year battle between NIPOST and the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) over the collection of Stamp Duties on electronic bank transactions. Due to a lack of political backing from its supervising ministry during executive reshuffles, NIPOST lost a critical statutory revenue stream that could have financed nationwide postal digitisation (Ivuoma *et al.*, 2025; Onibon *et al.*, 2022).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *5.1 Conclusion*

This study aimed to determine the effect of political instability on the performance of public enterprises in Nigeria, using the experience of the Nigerian postal service (NIPOST) between 2015 and 2024 as a starting point. The results of both quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted confirm the existence of this effect. The change in the political establishment, particularly the short-term parliamentary mandates, the dismissals and appointments of executives, and the shift in the government's policy focus, undermine the efficient functioning of public enterprises. In other words, the Nigerian postal service is not a dynamic economic actor that can withstand the challenges of the modern business environment, but a system that is susceptible to the continuous and debilitating changes brought about by political instability. This conclusion conforms to the Public Choice theory and Neopatrimonialism, both of which predict the observed dynamics in public enterprise performance. The alternating government in Nigeria resorts to the expropriation of resources from the public enterprises, neglect, and sabotage of their infrastructure, and the mismanagement of their operations on a broad scale, and thus undermine their performance.

### *5.2 Policy Recommendations*

To insulate NIPOST and other Nigerian public enterprises from the corrosive effects of political instability and restore operational performance, the following actionable policy recommendations are proposed:

1. **Statutory Security of Tenure for Leadership:** The National Assembly should amend the NIPOST Act (and equivalent SOE enabling statutes) to grant fixed, single four- or five-year statutory tenures for Postmasters-General and chief executives. Removal should only occur on proven grounds of gross misconduct or professional incompetence, vetted by a two-thirds Senate confirmation, thereby insulating leadership from arbitrary ministerial reshuffles.

2. **Legislative Protection for Strategic Reform Blueprints:** Major public sector reform strategies should be embedded in legally binding institutional frameworks rather than executive directives. Enacting the long-delayed National Postal Reform Bill would create an independent Postal Regulatory Commission, effectively decoupling commercial postal operations from ministerial political interference (OECD, 2020; Oladosu *et al.*, 2024).
3. **Full Commercialization and Financial Autonomy**: NIPOST should be fully commercialized into a public limited liability company (PLC) operating under strict Corporate Governance Guidelines (OECD, 2021). Granting complete financial autonomy would allow NIPOST to enter joint-venture partnerships, access private capital markets for infrastructure modernization, and operate free from civil service budgetary delays (Isah *et al.*, 2024; Umezu, 2024).
4. **Merit-Based Management and Workforce Motivation:** Executive board appointments should be strictly merit-based, requiring proven corporate and logistics industry experience. Furthermore, management must establish competitive performance-tied reward systems to rebuild worker motivation and institutional commitment (Adiele, 2024).

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