

Assessment Of Abia State Residents' Perception Of Governor Alex Otti's Administration

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Abstract

This study assessed Abia residents' perception of Governor Alex Otti's administration since the 2023 political transition in Abia State, Nigeria. The study set out to empirically determine the level of the influence of communication channels as regards the awareness of the policies of the administration, approval ratings, sectorial performance perception, and areas of perceived concerns. Anchoring on the agenda setting and public sphere theories, the study adopted a mixed-method approach, combining survey and in-depth interview methods. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which 384 copies, representing 96%, were returned and found usable. In addition, 15 interviewees drawn from the three senatorial zones of the state participated in the qualitative aspect of the study. Data were analyzed using frequency tables, simple percentages, mean scores, involving thematic analysis. Findings revealed that the level of awareness of Governor Alex Otti's policies and programmes among Abia residents was high (270), with 71% of respondents indicating that they obtained information mainly through social media and conventional media. The study also found a generally high mean value of 3.0 approval rating of the administration, as respondents expressed satisfaction with its performance in major sectors such as infrastructure, economy, education, healthcare, security, civil service welfare, and transparency in public resources management. The study also found that residents were generally pleased with the performance of Governor Alex Otti's administration, although more attention is needed in rural and community development, balanced distribution of projects, and improved budget transparency. The study recommended that the government should broaden its communication channels, improve rural development efforts, sustain performance in key sectors, and remain proactive, prudent, and accountable in governance.

Keywords: Assessment, Perception, Abia state, Governor Otti, Administration

INTRODUCTION

Governance in a democratic system is built on the idea that leaders are chosen by the people and must remain accountable to them. In other words, political power belongs to the citizens, and leaders are expected to serve based on the people's expectations and needs. But accountability does not only happen during elections. Citizens are expected to continuously evaluate their leaders based on what they see, hear, and experience. When people believe that the government is performing well, they tend to show support and trust. When they feel disappointed, they withdraw trust or express criticism. Scholars explain that public opinion is therefore one of the strongest tools through which citizens influence governance and democratic accountability (Bovens et al., 2023). In recent years, studies show that citizens' trust in government institutions has become weaker in many countries, including African democracies, where people feel that government promises do not match real-life outcomes, trust declines (Adaba et al., 2024). In Africa, recent governance perception reports also reveal that how citizens feel about governance sometimes differs from expert or administrative assessments. This shows why it is important to measure public opinion directly instead of assessing how people think (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2025).

Public opinion simply refers to what people think, feel, and believe about government and leadership. These opinions are often formed through two main channels: personal experience (such as road conditions, electricity supply, security, schools, and hospitals) and information received through media and political communication. Sometimes, even when a government claims to be performing well, citizens may still have negative perceptions if they feel excluded, poorly informed, or dissatisfied with implementation. Bovens et al (2023). Public opinion therefore serves as an important mechanism through which citizens hold leaders accountable and influence governance outcomes. This is why empirical research—especially at the state level—is necessary to understand how residents truly assess their leaders. In democratic systems, public opinion serves as a feedback mechanism. It tells leaders whether citizens approve or disapprove of their actions. Democratic accountability frameworks emphasize that governance improves when citizens are able to evaluate leaders and express their views freely (Bovens et al., 2023). When citizens perceive fairness, transparency, and responsiveness, they are more likely to trust government institutions.

However, recent surveys across African countries suggest that trust in public institutions and leaders is declining in several contexts (Adaba et al., 2024). In Nigeria, national survey data show that citizens' evaluations of democracy and governance are strongly influenced by their lived experiences and perceptions of performance (Afrobarometer, 2025; Lewis, 2023). While national surveys provide useful insights, governance is experienced locally. Residents interact directly with state governments through infrastructure projects, public services, and communication from state officials. Therefore, studying public opinion at the state level—such as in Abia State—is important for understanding how governance is perceived in real-life context. Abia State is one of the states in Nigeria's South-East region, with Aba as a major commercial center and Umuahia as the capital. Since Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999, Abia's politics has experienced long periods of party dominance and strong political competition centered on development promises and service delivery. Reports and commentaries have noted that the People's Democratic Party (PDP) governed Abia State from 1999 to 2023, shaping political expectations and voter perceptions of governance continuity (BusinessDay, 2023). Ahead of the 2023 elections, political tensions and internal party disagreements were widely reported, indicating a shifting political landscape (The Nation, 2022). Understanding this political history is important because citizens do not evaluate a new governor in isolation. They compare current performance with past administrations. Their expectations are shaped by previous experiences, political promises, and the overall economic and social situation of the state. Therefore, measuring public opinion in Abia requires considering this broader political context.

The 2023 governorship election marked a significant political transition in Abia State. The Independent

National Electoral Commission (INEC) declared Alex Chioma Otti of the Labour Party as the winner of the March 18, 2023 governorship election (Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2023; Thisday, 2023). He was subsequently sworn in as Governor on May 29, 2023. In his inaugural speech, Governor Otti presented his administration as one focused on rebuilding and reforming Abia State, signaling a new direction in governance. Political transitions of this nature often raise public expectations. Citizens begin to assess whether campaign promises are being fulfilled and whether visible changes occur within a reasonable time.

This study therefore seeks to empirically assess public opinion on Governor Alex Otti's administration within the broader framework of democratic accountability, political communication, and state-level governance in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Public opinion is central to democratic governance because it reflects how citizens evaluate leadership performance, transparency, responsiveness, and accountability. In democratic systems, leaders derive legitimacy not only from electoral victory but from continuous public approval shaped by governance outcomes and communication practices. However, recent studies across African democracies indicate declining levels of trust in public institutions and political leaders, often linked to perceived gaps between campaign promises and actual performance. In Nigeria, although national surveys show that citizens' assessment of democracy and governance is strongly influenced by lived experiences and performance perception, these national-level findings do not adequately capture state-level dynamics where governance is directly experienced through local infrastructure, economic conditions, public service delivery, and state-led reforms.

In the case of Abia State, the emergence of Governor Alex Otti's administration in 2023 has generated widespread public discourse across media platforms. Various media reports, political commentaries, and social media discussions present mixed narratives about the administration. On one hand, some reports highlight visible improvements in infrastructure, urban renewal, and efforts toward economic revitalization. On the other hand, criticisms have emerged regarding issues such as uneven development across senatorial zones, concerns about rural community inclusion, and questions surrounding transparency and policy implementation. These contrasting narratives create a fragmented perception landscape among residents.

However, much of this discourse is largely based on media framing, partisan interpretations, and individual opinions, which may not accurately represent the collective views of the broader population. Without systematic and scientific measurement, it becomes difficult to determine whether public opinion is predominantly positive, negative, or divided, and what specific factors shape these perceptions. Therefore, the core problem this study addresses is the perceived lack of a structured, survey-based assessment that allows Abia residents themselves to objectively evaluate the performance of Governor Alex Otti's administration since the 2023 political transition. By shifting the focus from media-driven narratives to citizens' lived experiences and expressed opinions, this study also seeks to provide a more reliable basis for how citizens of Abia perceive and understand governance.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of influence of communication channels on Abia resident's awareness regarding the policies of Governor Alex Otti's administration?
2. What is the overall approval rating of Governor Alex Otti's administration among Abia residents?

3. What is the perception of Abia residents regarding the impact of the administration's policies in specific sectors such as infrastructure, economy, education, healthcare, and security?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Perception

Perception is a central concept in this study because it explains how individuals interpret, evaluate, and make meaning of governance actions, policies, and outcomes. In the context of democratic governance, perception goes beyond objective reality; it reflects how citizens' experience, process, and judge government performance based on both direct encounters and mediated information.

Perception refers to the process through which individuals select, organize, and interpret information from their environment to form meaningful impressions about events, people, or institutions (Robbins & Judge, 2022). It is not merely a passive reception of information but an active cognitive process shaped by prior knowledge, beliefs, expectations, and social context. In governance studies, perception captures how citizens interpret government performance, responsiveness, and accountability. Similarly, Kotler and Keller (2021) explain perception as the process by which individuals interpret sensory inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. This implies that two individuals exposed to the same government policy or programme may form different perceptions depending on their experiences, values, and level of information. This subjective nature of perception makes it a critical variable in political and communication research.

In the political context, perception is often used to describe how citizens evaluate leadership and governance outcomes. According to Dalton (2021), citizens' perceptions of government performance are influenced by their daily experiences with public services, such as roads, healthcare, education, and security, as well as their exposure to political communication through the media. Thus, perception serves as a bridge between objective policy outcomes and subjective citizen evaluation. Perception plays a fundamental role in shaping citizens' attitudes toward political leaders and institutions. In democratic systems, citizens rarely have access to complete or technical information about governance. Instead, they rely on observable outcomes and mediated information to form judgments. As noted by Norris (2022), citizens evaluate governments based on perceived performance rather than actual policy complexity, making perception a key determinant of political legitimacy. In Nigeria and other developing democracies, governance perception is strongly influenced by visible and tangible outcomes, such as infrastructure development, economic opportunities, and service delivery (Afrobarometer, 2025). When citizens observe improvements in these areas, they tend to form positive perceptions of government performance. Conversely, when such improvements are absent or unevenly distributed, negative perceptions emerge. Perception is therefore closely linked to trust, satisfaction, and legitimacy. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2025) emphasizes that citizens often assess governance not by official reports but by how government actions impact their everyday lives. This reinforces the idea that perception is grounded in lived experience rather than abstract policy claims. Citizens' perceptions of governance are shaped by multiple interrelated factors. One of the most important is personal experience. Individuals who directly benefit from government programmes—such as improved roads, access to healthcare, or enhanced security—are more likely to develop positive perceptions of government performance (Adaba et al., 2024).

Perception is often assessed across specific sectors that directly affect citizens' lives. These include infrastructure, economy, education, healthcare, and security. Citizens form perceptions based on their experiences in these sectors. For example, improved road networks and urban renewal projects may lead to positive perceptions of infrastructure development, while challenges in healthcare access may generate negative perceptions in the health sector. Lawal and Sani (2022) found that infrastructure development is a

strong predictor of citizens' satisfaction with government performance in Nigeria. Similarly, perceptions of economic performance are influenced by factors such as employment opportunities, business conditions, and cost of living. In the education sector, citizens evaluate government performance based on access, quality, and availability of educational facilities. In healthcare, perception is shaped by accessibility, affordability, and quality of services, while in security, it is influenced by crime rates and the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies.

Concept of Governance

Governance refers to the processes, structures, and systems through which public authority is exercised and public resources are managed for the benefit of society. It involves decision-making, policy formulation, implementation of programmes, service delivery, and the relationship between government and citizens. Governance is broader than government; while government refers to formal institutions of the state, governance encompasses the overall process through which societal issues are addressed and managed (Bovens et al., 2023). In democratic contexts, governance is expected to reflect principles such as transparency, accountability, responsiveness, participation, and rule of law. These principles ensure that political leaders remain answerable to citizens and that public resources are used effectively. Democratic accountability frameworks emphasize that governance quality is measured not only by institutional design but also by how citizens perceive leadership performance and fairness (Bovens et al., 2023). Recent African governance studies show that citizens increasingly evaluate governance based on tangible outcomes in their daily lives. Improvements in infrastructure, economic opportunities, healthcare delivery, education, and public safety significantly influence how citizens assess government effectiveness (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2025). When citizens observe visible development and service delivery improvements, trust in government institutions tends to increase. Conversely, when service delivery is weak or inconsistent, dissatisfaction grows and public confidence declines (Adaba et al., 2024).

In Nigeria, governance evaluation often focuses on subnational governments because state administrations play a critical role in delivering essential services and implementing development projects. Citizens' experiences with road infrastructure, sanitation, employment initiatives, educational reforms, and healthcare services are largely shaped by state-level governance structures. National survey data indicate that citizens' assessments of democracy and government performance are strongly tied to their lived experiences at local and state levels (Afrobarometer, 2025; Lewis, 2023).

Furthermore, governance in contemporary democracies is increasingly influenced by communication practices. The way policies are explained, justified, and publicized affects how citizens interpret government actions. Effective governance therefore requires not only sound policy decisions but also transparent and credible communication (Koliba, 2025). Where governments fail to communicate clearly, citizens may misinterpret policies or doubt leadership intentions, even when reforms are underway.

Governance is also evaluated through sectorial performance indicators. Citizens tend to assess governments across specific sectors such as: Infrastructural development, Economic management, job creation, Education reforms, Healthcare improvement and security/ public safety. Perceptions in these sectors collectively shape overall public approval or disapproval of an administration.

In Abia State, governance is seen to be the policies, programmes, reforms, and administrative actions undertaken by Governor Alex Otti's administration in Abia State since May 29, 2023.

Media and Political Communication

Media and political communication play an important role in shaping public opinion in democratic societies. Citizens rely on different media platforms to obtain information about government policies,

political developments, and leadership performance. Through news reports, political discussions, and official communications, the media help citizens understand what government is doing and how those actions affect their daily lives. As a result, media exposure is one of the major factors influencing how citizens evaluate political leaders and government performance (Berk, 2025). Political communication refers to the processes through which information about politics and governance is created, transmitted, and interpreted among political actors, the media, and citizens. Governments use political communication to inform the public about policies, explain decisions, and promote their programmes. At the same time, opposition groups, civil society organizations, and individual citizens also participate in political communication by expressing opinions and presenting alternative interpretations of government actions. This interaction creates a communication environment in which public opinion is continuously shaped and reshaped (Gana, 2025).

One important way the media influence public opinion is through agenda-setting, which refers to the ability of the media to determine which issues receive the most public attention. When certain issues receive frequent media coverage, citizens tend to consider those issues more important than others. For example, extensive reporting on infrastructure projects or economic challenges may influence how citizens evaluate government performance (Berk, 2025).

Another important influence is media framing, which refers to the way information is presented. The same political event can be interpreted differently depending on how it is reported. The choice of words, emphasis, and context used by the media can affect whether citizens interpret government actions positively or negatively (Koliba, 2025). This means that public opinion about a government may depend not only on actual performance but also on how government activities are communicated and interpreted. In contemporary societies, political communication takes place across both traditional and digital media platforms. Traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers remain important sources of political information, especially in developing countries. However, digital and social media platforms have expanded opportunities for citizens to participate in political discussions and share opinions. This mixed media environment allows information to circulate quickly and widely, increasing the influence of communication on political perception (Gana, 2025).

Studies in Nigeria indicate that citizens often depend on both traditional and digital media to obtain political information, making media exposure an important factor in shaping perceptions of governance and leadership. Information obtained through the media influences how citizens interpret government policies and evaluate political performance (Afrobarometer, 2025; Lewis, 2023). Effective political communication is therefore essential for democratic governance because it helps citizens understand government policies and programmes. Transparent and credible communication can improve public trust, while poor communication may lead to misunderstanding and negative perceptions even when policies are well intended (Koliba, 2025).

Within the context of this study, media and political communication refer to the various channels through which Abia residents obtain information about Governor Alex Otti's administration. These include radio, television, newspapers, and digital or social media platforms.

Perception and Democratic Accountability

Perception is closely linked to democratic accountability because it reflects how citizens interpret, evaluate, and respond to the actions of those in power. In democratic systems, accountability is not only exercised through formal institutions such as elections, legislatures, and oversight bodies, but also through citizens' continuous evaluation of government performance. This evaluation is largely shaped by perception, making it a critical component of how accountability functions in practice.

Democratic accountability refers to the obligation of elected leaders and public officials to justify their actions, respond to citizens' needs, and be subject to evaluation and possible sanctions by the electorate (Bovens et al., 2023). It ensures that those in power remain answerable to the people and that governance aligns with public expectations. Accountability operates through two key dimensions: answerability – the requirement for leaders to explain and justify their actions and enforceability – the ability of citizens to reward or sanction leaders, typically through elections or public pressure. However, for accountability to function effectively, citizens must first form perceptions about government performance, which then guide their responses.

Perception serves as the foundation of accountability because citizens do not directly observe all government activities. Instead, they rely on their interpretation of available information and lived experiences to evaluate leadership. According to Norris (2022), citizens' judgments about government legitimacy are largely based on perceived performance rather than technical policy details. If citizens perceive that the government is performing well, they are more likely to support and trust leadership. And if they perceive poor performance, they are more likely to criticize, withdraw support, or demand change. Thus, perception transforms governance outcomes into political consequences. In this sense, perception acts as a feedback mechanism in democratic governance. It communicates to leaders whether their actions are acceptable to the public and whether adjustments are needed. One of the key ways perception influences accountability is through its relationship with trust and legitimacy. Trust in government is largely built on how citizens perceive transparency, responsiveness, fairness and effectiveness of service delivery.

Studies across African democracies show that citizens' trust in government institutions declines when there is a mismatch between expectations and perceived performance (Adaba et al., 2024). This indicates that perception is not only about what the government does, but also about how citizens interpret those actions. Similarly, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2025) reports that citizens often evaluate governance based on visible and practical outcomes, such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to services. When these are perceived positively, governments gain legitimacy; when they are perceived negatively, legitimacy is weakened.

The media play a crucial role in shaping perception and, by extension, democratic accountability. Through news coverage, political commentary, and social media discussions, the media influence how citizens: Access information about government, interpret policy actions and form opinions about leadership. According to the Pew Research Center (2024), exposure to information significantly affects how citizens evaluate government performance. This aligns with communication theories such as agenda-setting and framing, which suggest that the media do not only inform citizens but also influence what they think about and how they think about it. In the context of democratic accountability, the media act as: Watchdogs that hold government accountable and information channels that shape citizens' perceptions.

However, media narratives can also be biased or fragmented, making it important to complement them with empirical research that captures broader public perception. While much research on democratic accountability focuses on national-level governance, perception is equally important at the subnational level, where citizens directly experience government actions. In states like Abia, residents interact with governance through Road infrastructure healthcare services, education systems, security arrangements and economic policies.

These everyday experiences shape how citizens perceive government performance and, consequently, how they hold leaders accountable.

Abia State: Historical Background.

Abia State, located in Nigeria's South-East geopolitical zone, was created in 1991 from the old Imo State. Its capital, Umuahia, and its industrial commercial hub, Aba, are major centers of trade and innovation in the region (Abia State Government, 2024). Historically the state has been noted for a strong entrepreneurial culture (Aba's trading clusters), rich cultural heritage, and an educated civil society; but since its creation it has also contended with structural development deficits and governance weaknesses common to many Nigerian subnational units. The state's fiscal and infrastructural profile prior to 2023 established the baseline against which subsequent public perceptions of any new administration would be judged. For instance, official state financial documents and public audits show that Abia accumulated significant domestic expenditure and salary arrears in preceding years, with public-sector wage backlogs, accrued pension obligations and poor public service delivery, forming part of the pre-2023 governance landscape. (Kalu, 2022; Obi & Nnaji, 2022).

Concept of Infrastructural Development

Infrastructural development has emerged as one of the most defining features of Governor Alex Otti's administration, widely recognized both within Abia State and across Nigeria as a hallmark of performance-driven governance. In the context of this study, infrastructural development is conceptualized as the strategic planning, execution, and visible transformation of physical and social infrastructure, aimed at repositioning Abia State for economic growth, urban functionality, and improved quality of life. At a broader level, infrastructure represents the backbone of development, facilitating mobility, commerce, access to services, and overall socio-economic advancement. It includes critical components such as road networks, drainage systems, urban definition, infrastructural development under Governor Alex Otti's administration is widely perceived as a symbol of governance effectiveness and renewed leadership direction. Since the inception of the administration in May 2023, infrastructural interventions—particularly in key urban centers such as Aba and Umuahia—have been widely heralded in national discourse, media reports, and public commentary as evidence of a deliberate commitment to reversing years of infrastructural decay. The reconstruction of major road networks, aggressive urban renewal initiatives, and sustained efforts in flood control and environmental management have collectively repositioned Abia State as a case study in subnational infrastructural transformation. Conceptually, this positions infrastructural development within the administration as not merely a policy area, but a governance philosophy anchored on visibility, impact, and public value delivery. The administration's approach reflects a shift from abstract policy articulation to tangible, citizen-centered outcomes, where development is measured by what people can see, use, and experience in their daily lives. In this study, infrastructural development is therefore examined through a performance-perception nexus, where the success of governance is evaluated based on how infrastructural projects translate into lived experiences. Residents assess the administration through improvements in road accessibility, reduction in flooding, enhanced urban aesthetics, and increased ease of doing business. These visible transformations have contributed significantly to shaping a positive perception of the administration's capacity to deliver results.

Furthermore, infrastructural development under Governor Alex Otti is closely linked to the broader objective of economic revitalization, particularly in Aba, historically regarded as the commercial nerve center of Abia State. The renewed focus on road reconstruction, drainage, and urban planning in Aba has been interpreted as a strategic effort to restore the city's economic vibrancy and attract investment. This has reinforced the perception of infrastructure as both an economic enabler and a governance priority. Despite the widespread commendation, it is also important to situate infrastructural development within a spatial and perceptual framework, acknowledging that citizens' experiences may vary across the three senatorial zones of Abia State. While urban centers have witnessed significant infrastructural

improvements, perceptions in some rural or less-developed areas may differ, thereby introducing important nuances into the overall evaluation of the administration. Ultimately, infrastructural development in the context of Governor Alex Otti's administration is conceptualized as a central pillar of governance that combines visibility, functionality, and symbolic value. It serves not only as a driver of development but also as a powerful indicator of leadership performance and democratic accountability, shaping how citizens interpret and evaluate the administration.

Concept of Communication Channels

Communication channels are a vital component of governance, serving as the medium through which government policies, programmes, and activities are disseminated to the public. In the context of this study, communication channels are conceptualized as the various platforms and mechanisms through which information flows between the government and citizens, shaping awareness, understanding, and ultimately perception of governance.

At a general level, communication channels in governance include:

- i. Conventional media (radio, television, newspapers)
- ii. Social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, YouTube)
- iii. Interpersonal and community-based communication (town hall meetings, community gatherings, political mobilization structures)

These channels collectively determine the extent to which citizens are informed about government actions and are able to engage with governance processes.

In the context of Governor Alex Otti's administration, communication channels have been widely perceived as active, diverse, and strategically utilized, contributing significantly to the high level of awareness of government policies and programmes among residents. The administration's use of both traditional and digital media platforms has been positively acknowledged as enhancing visibility and accessibility of governance information. Conceptually, communication channels are viewed as a mediating variable between governance actions and public perception. Government activities, no matter how impactful, can only influence public opinion when they are effectively communicated. Thus, communication channels serve as the link that connects policy implementation with citizens' awareness and interpretation.

Within this study, communication channels are examined through a performance-perception framework, where their effectiveness is assessed based on:

- i. The level of awareness they generate among residents
- ii. The accessibility and reach of information across different demographic groups
- iii. The credibility and reliability of the information disseminated
- iv. The ability to facilitate engagement and feedback

The findings of this study, which indicate a high level of awareness driven largely by social media and conventional media, reinforce the importance of communication channels as key drivers of perception formation.

Furthermore, the administration's communication approach reflects an understanding of the evolving media landscape, where digital platforms play a dominant role in shaping public discourse. Social media, in particular, provides real-time updates, visual evidence of government activities, and interactive engagement with citizens, thereby enhancing transparency and responsiveness. At the same time, conventional media remains relevant, especially in reaching broader and more diverse audiences, including

those in areas with limited digital access. Community-based communication also plays a significant role in bridging information gaps, particularly in rural areas. However, it is important to note that communication channels can also be influenced by bias, misinformation, and political narratives, which may affect how government actions are interpreted. This underscores the need for empirical research, such as this study, to provide a more balanced and representative assessment of public perception.

Ultimately, communication channels in the context of Governor Alex Otti's administration are conceptualized as a strategic governance tool that enhances information dissemination, promotes transparency, and shapes citizens' perception of leadership performance. Their effectiveness determines not only the level of public awareness but also the degree of public engagement and trust in government.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory and Public Sphere Theory as the main theoretical foundations for explaining how public opinion is formed and shaped in relation to governance.

Agenda setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how residents become aware of government policies and programmes. The theory explains that the issues emphasized by the media tend to become the issues that citizens consider important. Frequent media coverage of government activities increases public awareness and shapes citizens' understanding of governance priorities (Berk, 2025). In the context of this study, Agenda-Setting Theory helps explain how Abia residents become informed about the activities of Governor Alex Otti's administration. Residents who are frequently exposed to media reports about government policies and programmes are more likely to develop opinions about the administration than those with limited media exposure. The theory also supports the study's examination of the relationship between media exposure and public opinion, which is one of the key objectives of the research. Differences in media exposure may lead to differences in awareness and perception of governance performance among residents.

Agenda-Setting Theory is therefore relevant because it explains how media attention to governance issues influences public awareness and opinion formation.

Public Sphere Theory

Public Sphere Theory explains how citizens participate in public discussions about political issues and governance. The theory was developed by Jürgen Habermas in 1962 in his book "the structural transformation of the public sphere". It emphasizes the importance of open public debate in democratic societies. According to the theory, democratic governance depends on the existence of a space where citizens can freely discuss political issues, exchange opinions, and evaluate government performance. This space, known as the public sphere, allows citizens to form opinions collectively and influence governance through public dialogue (Bovens et al., 2023). The public sphere includes various platforms where citizens share and debate political ideas. These platforms include traditional media such as newspapers, radio, and television, as well as modern digital platforms such as social media and online forums. Through these communication channels, citizens gain information about governance and participate in discussions that shape public opinion. The public sphere therefore plays an important role in democratic accountability by enabling citizens to evaluate leadership performance and express their views (Koliba, 2025).

In democratic societies, the public sphere promotes transparency and accountability because leaders are aware that their actions are subject to public scrutiny. When citizens actively participate in public discussions, governments are more likely to respond to public concerns and expectations. Public debate therefore serves as a bridge between citizens and political leaders and strengthens democratic governance

(Bovens et al., 2023). The uniqueness of Public Sphere Theory lies in its emphasis on collective discussion as the foundation of public opinion formation. Unlike communication theories that focus mainly on media influence, Public Sphere Theory highlights the role of public interaction and debate in shaping citizens' opinions. Another unique aspect of the theory is its focus on citizen participation in democratic processes. The theory suggests that democracy functions best when citizens are actively involved in discussing governance issues rather than remaining passive observers. Public Sphere Theory also recognizes that public opinion develops through social interaction. Citizens do not form opinions independently; instead, they exchange ideas and perspectives through discussions in communities, workplaces, and online platforms. These interactions contribute to the development of shared public attitudes toward governance (Koliba, 2025).

One major strength of Public Sphere Theory is that it emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in democratic governance. The theory provides a strong explanation of how public discussions contribute to democratic accountability and political legitimacy (Bovens et al., 2023). Another strength is that the theory is highly relevant in contemporary societies where digital communication platforms have expanded opportunities for political participation. Social media platforms allow citizens to share opinions, debate policies, and evaluate government performance, thereby strengthening the public sphere. The theory is also useful in public opinion studies because it explains how citizens' opinions are influenced by discussions with others. Public discussions often reinforce or modify individual opinions about political leaders and government policies. The theory also assumes that citizens are willing to participate actively in public discussions, whereas many individuals may remain politically disengaged or indifferent.

Public Sphere Theory has been criticized for presenting an idealistic view of democratic participation. Critics argue that real-world public spheres are often dominated by powerful political and economic interests, which may influence public discussions and limit equal participation (Koliba, 2025). Another criticism is that the theory was originally developed in the context of traditional mass media and may not fully account for the fragmented nature of modern digital communication. Online discussions often occur in separate groups with similar views, which may reduce meaningful public debate.

Despite these criticisms, Public Sphere Theory remains important in studies of democratic governance because it explains how public discussions contribute to opinion formation and accountability. Public Sphere Theory is relevant to this study because it explains how Abia residents form opinions about Governor Alex Otti's administration through public discussions and information exchange. Residents discuss government performance through community interactions, media programmes, and social media platforms, and these discussions influence their perceptions of governance. The theory helps explain why public opinion is shaped not only by personal experience or media exposure but also by interactions among citizens. Discussions about infrastructure development, economic conditions, and public services may influence how residents evaluate the administration.

Therefore, Public Sphere Theory provides a useful explanation of how public discussions contribute to the formation of Abia residents' opinions about Governor Alex Otti's administration.

Empirical Review

Pew Research Center (2024) conducted an empirical study examining citizens' evaluations of government performance across several democratic countries. The study aimed to understand how citizens assess government effectiveness and how trust in political leadership develops through public opinion. The central objective of the research was to determine the major factors that influence citizens' approval or disapproval of government performance and to examine how economic conditions, service delivery, and political trust shape public opinion in democratic societies. The researchers adopted a survey research

design, administering structured questionnaires to more than 30,000 respondents across multiple democratic countries.

Findings from the study showed that citizens' evaluation of government performance depended largely on their perceptions of economic stability and service delivery effectiveness. Respondents who believed that the economy was improving were significantly more likely to express positive opinions about government performance, while those who perceived economic decline expressed more negative evaluations. The study also found that citizens' perceptions of employment opportunities, cost of living, and economic security were strong predictors of overall government approval.

The findings further indicated that perceived effectiveness of public services such as transportation, healthcare, education, and social welfare programmes played a major role in shaping public opinion. Respondents who reported satisfaction with public services were more likely to rate government performance positively, while those dissatisfied with services expressed more negative opinions about leadership performance.

The study also revealed that public opinion was influenced by information exposure and personal experience with government services. Citizens who reported frequent exposure to political information and news about government activities tended to express more definite opinions about government performance, while those with limited information exposure were more likely to express neutral or uncertain views. This finding suggests that access to information plays an important role in shaping citizens' evaluation of political leadership.

The study supports the argument that citizens evaluate governments primarily through their experiences with economic conditions and public services. Similarly, Abia residents' perceptions of Governor Alex Otti's administration are likely to be influenced by their experiences with infrastructure development, employment opportunities, business conditions, healthcare services, and education systems. The findings of the Pew Research Center study also support the idea that citizens form opinions about political leadership based on both objective experiences and subjective perceptions. This insight is important for the present study because Abia residents' opinions about Governor Alex Otti's administration may reflect not only measurable development outcomes but also residents' perceptions of leadership effectiveness and responsiveness..

Therefore, while Pew Research Center (2024) provides important global empirical evidence on citizens' evaluation of governance performance, it does not provide localized evidence on state-level governance perception in Nigeria. This study contributes to filling that gap by providing a focused survey-based assessment of Abia residents' public opinion on Governor Alex Otti's administration, thereby extending global public opinion research to a subnational Nigerian context.

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2025) conducted a comprehensive governance perception study as part of its broader effort to evaluate governance quality and leadership performance across African countries. The primary objective of the study was to understand how African citizens evaluate governance outcomes, leadership effectiveness, and accountability mechanisms from their own perspectives. The study sought to provide empirical evidence on how governance is experienced by ordinary citizens and how these experiences shape public opinion about political leadership and government performance. The study employed a large-scale perception-based research approach, drawing on survey data collected from citizens across multiple African countries. The perception component of the study relied on structured survey instruments designed to measure citizens' views on governance quality, service delivery, economic conditions, leadership effectiveness, and institutional accountability. Respondents were selected to reflect the demographic and geographical diversity of participating countries.

Findings from the study revealed that citizens' perceptions of governance often differed significantly from official performance indicators and government reports. While governments frequently emphasized policy achievements and administrative reforms, citizens tended to evaluate governance primarily on the basis of visible and practical improvements in their daily lives. Respondents commonly judged governance performance by observing tangible outcomes such as road

Africa Polling Institute (2024) conducted a comprehensive empirical study titled Citizens' Assessment of Government Performance in Nigeria, aimed at examining how Nigerians evaluate governance across key sectors and identifying the major factors influencing public satisfaction. The study was motivated by the need to provide evidence-based insights into citizens' perception of governance, particularly in a democratic context where public opinion plays a crucial role in shaping accountability and policy direction.

The findings of the study revealed that citizens' satisfaction with government performance was strongly influenced by their lived experiences of economic conditions and service delivery. Specifically, respondents who reported noticeable improvements in infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to public services expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction with government. Conversely, those who experienced economic hardship, poor service delivery, or lack of visible development projects were more likely to express dissatisfaction. This underscores the central role of performance-based evaluation, where citizens judge the government not by policy intentions but by tangible outcomes that directly affect their daily lives..

This study addresses a gap by focusing specifically on Abia State, providing a localized and in-depth assessment of residents' perception of Governor Alex Otti's administration. By doing so, it contributes to the literature by offering state-level empirical evidence on governance perception, thereby enriching the understanding of democratic accountability and public opinion in Nigeria's subnational context.

NOIPolls (2025) conducted a nationwide empirical study focused on measuring citizens' approval ratings of government performance in Nigeria, with the primary objective of tracking changes in public opinion over time. The study was designed to provide a regular and systematic assessment of how Nigerians evaluate governance, particularly in relation to policy decisions, economic conditions, and visible development outcomes. By generating periodic opinion data, the study contributes to understanding trends in democratic accountability and public trust in leadership.

Methodologically, the study adopted a quantitative survey research design, utilizing telephone survey techniques to reach respondents across the country.

The findings revealed that citizens' approval ratings of the government were strongly influenced by perceptions of economic conditions and policy effectiveness. Respondents who perceived improvements in economic stability, employment opportunities, and service delivery were more likely to rate government performance positively. In contrast, periods characterized by economic hardship, inflationary pressures, or perceived policy inefficiencies were associated with declining approval ratings.

The study did not disaggregate approval ratings to the level of individual state administrations or governors, thereby overlooking important subnational dynamics.

This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on Abia State, providing a detailed and context-specific assessment of residents' approval and perception of Governor Alex Otti's administration. By doing so, it contributes to the literature by offering empirical evidence at the state level, thereby deepening the understanding of how governance is perceived within subnational contexts and how such perceptions influence democratic accountability.

Africa Polling Institute (2023) — Nigerians' Perception of Democratic Governance

Conducted an empirical study examining Nigerians' perception of democratic governance and leadership performance, with the primary objective of assessing citizens' satisfaction with governance and identifying key concerns affecting democratic accountability. The study was motivated by the growing need to understand how citizens evaluate leadership within a democratic system, particularly in relation to performance outcomes, institutional effectiveness, and responsiveness to public needs.

Methodologically, the study adopted a quantitative national survey design, utilizing structured questionnaires administered to respondents selected through probability sampling techniques. This approach ensured that the sample was representative of Nigeria's diverse population across different geopolitical zones, socio-economic backgrounds, and demographic categories. The use of standardized survey instruments enhanced the reliability and comparability of responses, while data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, as well as inferential techniques to establish relationships between key variables.

The findings of the study revealed that citizens' evaluation of governance was largely influenced by economic conditions, quality of service delivery, and perceived leadership effectiveness. Respondents who reported improvements in areas such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, and access to public services expressed higher levels of satisfaction with democratic governance. On the other hand, dissatisfaction was more prevalent among respondents who experienced economic hardship, poor service delivery, or perceived inefficiencies in leadership.

The study further emphasized that perception of governance is fundamentally performance-driven, with citizens placing greater importance on tangible outcomes rather than political rhetoric or policy declarations. Leadership effectiveness, in particular, was identified as a critical factor, as respondents tended to evaluate governance based

Adeleke and Adeyemi (2023) conducted an empirical study titled *Public Opinion and Democratic Accountability: Citizens' Assessment of Governors' Performance in Nigeria*, which examined how Nigerian citizens evaluate the performance of state governors within a democratic context. The primary objective of the study was to determine the relationship between governance performance and public approval of governors, particularly in relation to democratic accountability.

The researchers adopted a survey research design, administering structured questionnaires to a sample of 1,200 respondents selected across six states using multistage sampling techniques. This approach ensured representation across different demographic and geographic groups, thereby enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the findings. The study measured key variables such as infrastructure development, economic conditions, trust in institutions, and overall approval ratings of governors. Findings revealed that citizens' approval of governors is strongly influenced by their perception of tangible development outcomes, especially in areas such as infrastructure and economic improvement. Respondents who observed visible projects—such as road construction, improved transportation systems, and economic opportunities—tended to rate their governors more positively. In addition, the study found a significant positive relationship between trust in government institutions and approval of governors, indicating that institutional credibility plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion. However, an important empirical gap exists in the study. While it provides broad, generalized findings across multiple states, it does not offer in-depth, context-specific analysis of individual states or particular governors. As such, it lacks the granularity needed to understand how local dynamics, cultural context, and state-specific policies influence public opinion.

Lawal and Sani (2022) conducted an empirical study titled Citizens' Satisfaction with Infrastructure Development and Government Performance in Nigeria, which examined how infrastructure development shapes public opinion of government performance. The primary objective of the study was to measure citizens' level of satisfaction with infrastructure and determine its influence on their overall evaluation of governance.

The researchers adopted a survey research design, administering structured questionnaires to 520 respondents selected through stratified sampling techniques. This method ensured adequate representation of different population groups, thereby improving the reliability of the findings. The study focused on key variables such as road infrastructure, public facilities, and citizens' satisfaction with government performance, providing a sector-specific approach to understanding public opinion.

Findings revealed that infrastructure development is one of the strongest predictors of citizens' satisfaction with government performance. Respondents who perceived visible improvements in roads, transportation systems, and public facilities expressed significantly higher levels of satisfaction and approval of the government. This suggests that tangible and visible development projects serve as critical benchmarks through which citizens evaluate leadership performance.

This study is highly relevant to the present research because it supports the argument that Abia residents are likely to evaluate Governor Alex Otti's administration based on observable improvements in infrastructure, particularly in areas such as road construction, transportation, and urban development. The findings align with the results of this study, where respondents frequently cited improvements in infrastructure as a major reason for their positive perception of the administration. However, an important empirical gap exists. The study provides generalized findings at the national level and does not offer context-specific analysis of individual states or administrations, particularly Abia State. It does not account for local dynamics, policy variations, or state-specific development efforts.

The present study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on Abia State and Governor Alex Otti's administration, thereby providing a localized and in-depth assessment of how infrastructure development influences public opinion. By examining residents' perceptions within a specific state context, this research contributes more detailed insights into the role of infrastructure in shaping governance evaluation at the subnational level in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed methods research design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive assessment of Abia residents' perception of Governor Alex Otti's administration. Mixed methods research enables the researcher to combine the strengths of both numerical measurement and in-depth exploration, thereby offering a richer understanding of complex social phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The quantitative aspect involved the use of structured questionnaires to generate measurable data on residents' perceptions, while the qualitative aspect involved semi-structured interviews to capture detailed explanations and contextual insights.

The population of this study comprises all residents of Abia State, Nigeria, who are considered eligible to express opinions about governance and the performance of Governor Alex Otti's administration. Since the study is a public opinion survey, the target population covers residents across the seventeen (17) Local Government Areas of the state: Aba North, Aba South, Arochukwu, Bende, Ikwuano, Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Isuikwuato, Obi Ngwa, Ohafia, Osisioma Ngwa, Ugwunagbo, Ukw East, Ukw West, Umuahia North, Umuahia South, and Umunneochi. Abia state is made up of 2,845,380 persons (comprising of 1,428,997 male population and 1,415,383 female population) as at 2006(NPC,2006). Nineteen years

have gone since the census figure was published. It means the current population of Abia state will be projected to reflect the time of study, using the UNDP's population index, the projected population will be 4,088,811.06 and the sample size using Taro Yemane's sample size calculation is 400.

This study adopts a dual sampling technique. Multi stage sampling was used for the selection of respondents for the questionnaire and purposive sampling was used for the indepth interview.

Data Presentation, Analysis Psychographic Data

Table 4.1.1 Gender

Gender	Frequency of Respondents'	Percentage
Male	211	55%
Female	173	45%
Total	384	100%

Table 4.1.2 Age

Age	Frequency of response	Percentage
18-25	70	18%
26-35	80	21%
36-45	106	28%
46 and above	128	33%
Total	384	100%

Table 4.1.3: Respondents' Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Students	67	17%
Civil servants	130	34%
Traders	99	26%
Unemployed	41	11%
Artisans (Politicians)	47	12%
Total	384	100%

Table 4.1.4: Educational Qualifications

Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary/SSCE	90	23%
ND/NCE	120	32%
HND/Bachelor's Degree	110	28%

Post-graduates (Msc/PhD)	64	17%
Total	384	100%

Source: Field survey 2026

In this study, the analysis revealed that there were more males (55%) than females (45%). In the area of Age distribution in the study those within the age range of 46 and above were marginally higher than other groups. The study also showed that civil servants constitute the highest proportion of respondents at (43%)..While, there were more respondents (32%) who had ND/NCE certificates in terms of education.

Analysis of Psychographic data

The analysis of psychographic data concentrated on data generated in response to the research question of the study. The research questions were designed to assess respondent’s perception regarding governor Alex Otti’s administration policies since the administration came on board in 2023.

Table 4.2.1 Influence of communication channels

Communication Channels	Frequency	Percentage
Conventional media	110	29%
Social media	160	42%
Community meetings	40	10%
Propaganda	74	19%
Total	384	100%

Table 4.2.1 shows that social media (42%) is the most influential communication channel through which Abia residents receive information about Governor Alex Otis administration.

Table 4.2.2: Perception of Overall Performance of Governor Alex Otti’s Administration

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σx	WM S (x̄)	Remarks
1	Governor Alex Otti’s administration has improved in all ramifications	109 (436)	201 (603)	45 (90)	29 (29)	384	1158	3.02	Agreed

The result from Table 4.2.2 shows that the majority of respondents agree that Governor Alex Otti’s administration has improved in all ramifications. This is evident from the 109 respondents (28%) who strongly agree and 201 respondents (52%) who agree, indicating a high level of acceptance among respondents

Table 4.2.3: Governor Alex Otti's Handling of Infrastructural Development

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σx	WMS ($\bar{x}$)	Remarks
1	Governor Alex Otti's administration's handling of infrastructural development is low	60 (240)	84 (252)	90 (180)	150 (150)	384	822	2.1	Rejected

The result from Table 4.2.3 shows that the majority of respondents disagree that Governor Alex Otti's administration's handling of infrastructural development is low. This is evident from the 90 respondents (23%) who disagreed and 150 respondents (39%) who strongly disagreed, indicating a high level of disagreement with the statement.

Table 4.2.4: Respondents' Perception of the Economy of Abia State

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σx	WMS ($\bar{x}$)	Remarks
1	Governor Alex Otti's administration is doing well to improve the economy of Abia State	90 (360)	220 (660)	50 (100)	24 (24)	384	1144	2.9	Accepted

The result from Table 4.2.4 shows that the majority of respondents believe that Governor Alex Otti's administration is doing well in improving the economy of Abia State. This is evident from the 90 respondents (23%) who strongly agree and 220 respondents (57%) who agree, indicating a high level of positive perception among respondents.

Table 4.2.5: Governor Alex Otti's Healthcare Programme

S/N	Questionnaire Item	VS	S	D	VD	N	Σx	WMS ($\bar{x}$)	Remarks
1	Are you satisfied with Governor Alex Otti's healthcare programme?	85 (340)	200 (600)	40 (80)	59 (59)	384	1079	2.8	Accepted

The result from Table 4.2.5 shows that the majority of respondents are satisfied with Governor Alex Otti's healthcare programme. This is evident from the 85 respondents (22%) who are very satisfied and 200 respondents (52%)

Table 4.2.6: Residents' Perception on Crime Rate in Abia State

S/N	Questionnaire Item	VS	S	D	VD	N	Σx	WMS ($\bar{x}$)	Remarks
1	Are you satisfied with the extent Governor Otti's administration has reduced crime rate in Abia State?	89 (356)	221 (663)	49 (98)	25 (25)	384	1142	3.0	Accepted

The result from Table 4.2.6 shows that the majority of respondents are satisfied with the extent to which Governor Alex Otti's administration has reduced crime rate in Abia State. This is evident from the 89 respondents (23%) who are very satisfied and 221 respondents (58%) who are satisfied, indicating a high level of satisfaction among respondents.

Table 4.2.7: Governor Alex Otti's Administration of Civil Service Welfare and Appointments

S/N	Questionnaire Item	VS	S	D	VD	N	Σx	WMS ($\bar{x}$)	Remarks
1	Are you satisfied with Governor Alex Otti's administration of civil service welfare and appointments?	84 (336)	200 (600)	45 (90)	55 (55)	384	1081	2.8	Accepted

The result from Table 4.2.7 shows that the majority of respondents are satisfied with Governor Alex Otti's administration of civil service welfare and appointments. This is evident from the 84 respondents (22%) who are very satisfied and 200 respondents (52%) who are satisfied, indicating a high level of satisfaction among respondents.

Table 4.2.8: Governor Alex Otti's Administration Management of Public Resources

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD	N	Σx	WM S ($\bar{x}$)	Remarks
1	Governor Alex Otti's administration is transparent in managing public resources in Abia State	87 (348)	223 (669)	50 (100)	24 (24)	384	1141	3.0	Accepted

The result from Table 4.2.8 shows that the majority of respondents agree that Governor Alex Otti's administration is transparent in managing public resources in Abia State. This is evident from the 87 respondents (23%) who strongly agree and 223 respondents (58%) who agree, indicating a high level of acceptance among respondents.

Presentation of Interview data

Influence of Communication Channels on Awareness of Government Policies

The responses from participants clearly indicate that communication channels have a strong and pervasive influence on residents' awareness of Governor Alex Otti's administration. Across all senatorial zones, respondents consistently reported high exposure to information through multiple channels, suggesting that awareness of government policies is widespread. A dominant pattern observed is the constant flow of information through both digital and traditional media. Many respondents highlighted that they receive updates on a daily basis, reflecting a high level of accessibility and engagement with government-related information.

Furthermore, respondents emphasized that communication channels are not limited to a single source, but rather operate in a multi-channel environment, including social media, conventional media, workplace discussions, and community interactions. This multiplicity enhances the reach and reinforcement of information.

Approval Rating and Positive Evaluation of the Administration

The responses from participants strongly indicate a high level of approval of Governor Alex Otti's administration among Abia residents. Across all senatorial zones, respondents expressed overwhelming satisfaction and admiration, often describing the administration in highly positive terms.

A recurring pattern in the responses is the perception that the governor has achieved significant developmental progress within a short period, especially when compared with previous administrations. Many respondents emphasized that the administration has delivered tangible results in key sectors such as infrastructure, transportation, healthcare, and workers' welfare. Another important dimension of approval is the visible improvement in living conditions and public services, which has directly impacted residents' daily experiences. Respondents highlighted improved infrastructure, better transportation systems, and relief from previous economic pressures. The findings also reveal strong emotional attachment and public confidence in the administration. Several respondents expressed personal satisfaction, gratitude and even political support for the governor's continued leadership.

Perception of Sectoral Performance Across Key Areas

The responses from participants reveal a strong positive perception of Governor Alex Otti's administration across key sectors, including infrastructure, economy, education, healthcare, and security. Respondents consistently indicated that the administration has made visible and impactful improvements in these sectors, which directly affect their daily lives. A dominant pattern across the responses is the belief that the administration has delivered comprehensive development across multiple sectors simultaneously, rather than focusing on a single area.

Infrastructure Development

Respondents strongly emphasized improvements in road networks and physical development, particularly in major urban centers like Aba and Umuahia.

Economic Growth and Business Improvement

Many respondents highlighted improvements in the economic environment, including increased business activities, reduced operational costs, and enhanced productivity.

Healthcare Improvement

Healthcare was identified as one of the sectors where respondents perceive significant progress, with better service delivery and accessibility.

Education Development

Respondents also acknowledged improvements in the education sector, indicating better facilities and overall development.

Security and Crime Reduction

A major theme across responses is the perception of improved security and reduced crime rate, which has enhanced residents' sense of safety.

Welfare of Workers and Social Stability

Some respondents also emphasized improvements in workers' welfare and general living conditions, contributing to overall satisfaction.

Rural Development as the Major Area of Concern

The responses from participants reveal that while Governor Alex Otti's administration is widely perceived as performing well, the primary area of concern identified by residents is limited development in rural and community areas. Across all senatorial zones, respondents consistently emphasized the need for greater government presence and infrastructural development in rural communities. A dominant pattern in the responses is the perception that development has been more concentrated in urban centers such as Aba and Umuahia, with rural areas receiving comparatively less attention.

Perception of Gradual and Strategic Development

Some respondents acknowledged that development is a gradual process and expressed confidence that rural areas will eventually receive attention as part of the administration's long-term plan

Mixed Perceptions on Rural Development Progress

While most respondents called for improvement, a few acknowledged that some level of rural development is already taking place, though not at the same scale as in urban areas

Urban–Rural Development Imbalance

Another key concern is the perceived **imbalance between urban and rural development**, with respondents advocating for a more equitable distribution of government projects.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One: What is the level of influence of communication channels on Abia residents' awareness regarding the policies of Governor Alex Otti's administration?

The information generated in table 4.2.1 was used as the basis of analysis in answering the above research questions. The data revealed that the majority of Abia residents got aware of governor Alex Otti's policies through social media at 42% and conventional media at 29% totaling 71%. Indicating that the awareness was high. The opinion was strongly supported by 160 and 110 respondents respectively. The implication of this data is that the majority of the residents in Abia State accepted the reality of a high level of awareness of Abia state government policies.

This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of these respondents live in the cities where there is better access to communication network services and broadcast houses and newspapers. Nevertheless, the overall data showed that quantitatively, the awareness was high.

From the quantitative study, the majority opinion from the quantitative study was also supported by the majority of those interviewed in the qualitative study. For instance, 10 interviewees asserted that they were aware of governor Otti's policies through social media and conventional media and came from Abia South and Central zones. While 5 interviewees from Abia North senatorial district on the contrary opinion said they were basically aware more through their community meeting and propaganda of party faithfuls in their locality. According to them, network issues do not allow them to get adequate information about government activities. . This finding agrees with the study by Pew Research Center (2024), which explained that people's opinions about the government are influenced by the information they receive and their personal experiences. In simple terms, when people are exposed to more news and information about government activities, they are more likely to know about them and form opinions. This result can also be explained using the Agenda-Setting Theory. The theory states that the media may not tell people what to think, but it tells them what to think about. In this study, the frequent reporting of Governor Alex Otti's policies and programmes on social media and traditional media made people more aware of them. This is why many respondents were informed about government activities. The fact that social media had the

highest percentage (42%) shows that it plays a major role in drawing people's attention to government issues. When the media keeps talking about certain policies or programmes, people begin to see them as important.

Research Question Two: What is the overall approval rating of Governor Alex Otti's administration among Abia residents?

The result of data generated in tables 4.2.2 to 4.2.8 were used as the basis for answering question two. From the data it was majority of the respondents as follows: Tab 4.2.2(80%), 4.2.3(94%), 4.2.4(80%), 4.2.5(64%), 4.2.7(80%), 4.2.9(74%), 4.2.10(81%), 4.2.11(80%), 4.2.12(74%), 4.2.13(73%), 4.2.14(74%) 4.2.15(80%). The rating in all the variables show a very high rating of governor Alex Otti's administration in all ramifications.

From the qualitative study, the results obtained also revealed a majority support by 12 of the interviewees accepting that the Alex Otti's regime has a high rating. On the other hand, 3 of the interviewees from Abia North were of the opinion that the other two senatorial zones (Abia South and central) had mere concentration of Governor Alex Otti's development programmes than Abia North. Some of them opined that there are concentrated efforts on the Abia Central zone (Umuahia) where modernizing the state capital is a priority to the state government with key projects like reconstruction of IBB Ahiaeke Road, Ossah six lane road, Aguiyi Ironsi Boulevard and rehabilitation of Umuahia-Uzuakoli road, Also construction of new mega transport terminals and modernization of the city centre. Then the government is also concentrating activities in Abia South (Aba Metropolitan Area) with highest concentration of massive road reconstruction to restore Aba as a commercial hub with key projects such as completion of Port-harcourt Road, Jubilee road, Queens Street Ehi road and extensive work on Aba-owerri Road, University road, Green Avenue and college road.

There are significant drainage and flood control projects to fix long standing flooding issues. One of them said "although the governor is doing well, of all the three senatorial zones, Abia North is behind the other two though there are projects going on in the zone such as rural development and connection of communities". "Kudos to him anyway for the Omenuko Bridge abandoned by the past government but the governor came to rescue the zone". This finding is similar to the study by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2025), which explained that people usually judge government performance based on what they can see and experience in their daily lives. For example, citizens look at things like road construction, job opportunities, healthcare services, and other visible developments. This supports the results of this study, where respondents rated the government highly based on noticeable improvements.

Indeed, the strength of information generated from the qualitative and quantitative data is sufficient to provide a safe answer to research question two as it upholds the opinion of the three senatorial zones of Abia State residents.

Research Question Three: What is the perception of Abia residents regarding the impact of the administration's policies in key sectors such as infrastructure, economy, education, healthcare, and security?

The analysis of obtained data in tab 4.2.5, 4.2.6, 4.2.7, 4.2.8, 4.2.9, 4.2.10 about economy, infrastructure, education, healthcare, crime and welfare respectively. These tables are expressions of Abia residents in terms of how they perceive the administration of Governor Alex Otti. This is evident in the cumulative percentage of 64%, 63%, and 80%, 64%, 74%, 81% and 74% respectively. The implication of the findings in these data showed that there is a majority support on the view of Abia residents concerning the impact of the policies of the administration in key sectors of governance in the state. Results obtained in

qualitative study from the data of about 13 respondents believe that key sectors of the economy of Abia State had improved under the administration of Governor Otti. Though 2 of the interviewees did not agree to the assertion, with the view that some areas of the state are yet to get a positive impact of the government policies. The understanding here indicates that much as many people believe that the key sectors are in upswing significantly, there are still people who do not share this opinion. But in general terms, this finding no doubt helped to retire research question three. These findings agree with the study by Lawal and Sani (2022), which found that infrastructure and key sectors like healthcare and security strongly influence how citizens judge government performance. This supports the idea that people use visible developments in these sectors to evaluate leadership.

This finding can be better explained using the Public Sphere Theory. Public Sphere Theory, as proposed by Jürgen Habermas, emphasizes that public opinion is formed through open discussion, information exchange, and participation in public discourse within society. It suggests that citizens actively engage with information, debate issues, and collectively shape opinions about governance.

In the context of this study, the positive perception of Governor Alex Otti's administration can be linked to the active flow of information and discussion across various communication channels such as social media, conventional media, community meetings, and interpersonal interactions. These platforms serve as components of the public sphere where residents access information, share experiences, and evaluate government performance.

When key sectors like the economy, healthcare, and security show visible improvements and are widely discussed in these public spaces, citizens are more likely to form favourable opinions about the administration. Thus, public opinion is not only shaped by media presentation but also by collective discourse and shared experiences within the public sphere.

The qualitative findings further support this explanation, as interviewees from the three senatorial zones consistently expressed positive views about the administration's performance in key sectors. This indicates that continuous interaction within the public sphere—through discussions in markets, workplaces, communities, and digital platforms—has contributed to shaping a generally positive perception among Abia residents.

Overall, this demonstrates that both participatory communication processes and real-life experiences within the public sphere play a crucial role in influencing citizens' evaluation of government performance. This demonstrates that Abia residents have a highly positive perception of the impact of Governor Alex Otti's policies across key sectors. The administration is widely viewed as delivering visible, practical, and multi-sectoral development, particularly in infrastructure, economy, healthcare, education, and security.

The findings indicate that improvements in these sectors have enhanced residents' quality of life, economic activities, and sense of security, thereby providing strong qualitative support for the study's findings under Objective three..

The summary of findings made were as follows:

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative analysis showed that 71% of Abia residents got aware of Governor Alex Otti's policies and programmes mainly through social media and conventional news media despite the qualitative data from Abia North of 5 interviewees who gave a contrary view against the majority.

1. The findings made in the research question two showed that a high cumulative rating from table 4.2.2 - 4.2.15 from the different variables about Governor Alex Otti's policies and programmes in

different areas of development programmes. The qualitative study also corroborated the high ratings of the quantitative data.

2. To the research question 3, it was generally accepted by majority of the respondents as reviewed in Tables 4.2.7, 4.2.9, 4.2.10, and 4.2.14 about the economy infrastructure, education, healthcare, crime fighting / provision of equipment and welfare respectively that Governor Alex Chioma Otti's administration performed very well in these key sectors. The qualitative data also confirmed this except the minority views from Abia North who said that the zone is left behind in those key areas.

CONCLUSION

The finding that 71% of respondents are aware of Governor Alex Otti's policies indicates a high level of awareness among Abia residents. This is largely driven by social media and conventional media, which serve as the major information channels. It can therefore be concluded that communication channels have a strong influence on residents' awareness, as citizens are well-informed and actively attentive to government policies.

Furthermore, the 80% of the respondents who were strongly satisfied and satisfied respectively, on governor Alex Otti's administration performance on key sectors, also played a significant role in the overall acceptance by Abia residents with a high mean value of 2.9.

However, for those majority respondents who rejected the assertion that the government is not living up to expectations in rural community development, it is a good pointer to the government to beat up and direct its energy towards that area. A 2.1 mean value rejection is a thing to worry about.

Though, it is safe to conclude that the majority of the quantitative and qualitative data showed that Abia residents are pleased so far with the performance of Governor Alex Otti's administration in Abia State.

RECOMMENDATION

1. It is recommended that despite the cumulative 71% ratings of respondents which is on a positive note, the government should take cognizance of opposition propaganda which tend to negate the efforts of the government in terms of policies and programmes. The government should explore other avenues of information other than social media and conventional media.
2. The overall rating of the governor Alex Otti's administration in both Abia South and Abia Central is relatively high, but the thumbs down seems to be in Abia North where respondents indicated that the government is concentrating more of its programmes of development in Abia South and Central more than the Abia North. The government should try as much as possible to balance up.
3. It is also recommended that the Governor Alex Otti's administration should consolidate on the positive ratings of the Abia residents in key areas of healthcare, education, economy, security, welfare, appointments and infrastructure. While it should consolidate on these areas it should also look passionately on other areas such as sanitation and street trading. And the administration of Governor Alex Otti should give priority to rural community development as there is a strong feeling from respondents that the administration is more committed to Abia South and Abia Central and less in Abia North which seems to have less attention from the government.

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