

**THE DAWN OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY IN NIGERIA: AN  
EXAMINATION OF FEASIBILITY**

**BY**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**BENIN CITY**

**JANUARY, 2025**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION,  
FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD  
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UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**JANUARY, 2025**

## CERTIFICATION

We the undersigned, hereby certify that this research work was carried out by **Adebayo Philip Opeyemi** with Matriculation Number: **ART1802009** of the Department of Religion, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Award of Bachelor of Science Degree (B.A.) in Religion

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**(Head of Department)**

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**Date:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date:**

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to my lovely and wonderful parents Mr. and Mrs. R Aimuan and to everyone who has supported me one way or the other and above all, to almighty God who make the dream come true.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my heartfelt gratitude to God for His unwavering love and guidance in the successful completion of this project. My deepest appreciation goes to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kester and Patience Aimuan, for their unwavering financial, emotional, and spiritual support. May God bless them abundantly.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study examined the dawn of local government autonomy in Nigeria: an examination of feasibility. Thus, this study investigated the constitutional and legal frameworks for local government autonomy, assess the benefits and challenges of implementing autonomy and explore stakeholder roles in facilitating autonomy. The participants in this study were 120 residents of Ovia north east local government selected through the use of systematic sampling technique. Survey design through structured questionnaire were used to extract relevant data for the study. The hypotheses of the study were tested using chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical tool. The study discovered that stakeholders has roles to play in actualizing local government autonomy, such roles includes ensuring local governments to get their allocations directly from the federal government, serving as watch dog making sure allocated funds are prudently managed and made to benefit people at the grassroots, involving anti-graft agencies to monitor local government spending since no immunity to local government chairmen and agitating for the amendments of the constitution to return the conduct of council polls to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as it currently conducted by State Electoral Commissions (SIECs). The study recommended that in supporting the pronouncement by the Supreme Court of Nigeria of ensuring democratic governance at the local government level in the 36 states of the federation, there should equally be implementation of Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007 across all the States of the Federation. This legislation compels states to conduct periodic elections, thereby ensuring that there exist democratically elected local government officials as against the usual practice where state governors constitute Caretaker Committees or Transition Councils to superintend over local government councils. The significance of this is that it will help in the consolidation of the nation's democracy, especially at the grass root level and engender both financial and political accountability. Apart from this, it will equally ensure international good practice that will result in greater efficiency in the allocation and management of public expenditure, revenue collection, debt control and transparency in fiscal matters.*

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background to the Study**

The adoption of a federal arrangement in a country presupposes a clear division of powers among different levels of government. In such a system, a written constitution outlines the distribution of authority and defines the coordinate relationships between the levels of government concerning their respective functions. This arrangement implies that each level of government possesses the authority to make decisions and act within its defined jurisdiction without undue interference from other levels of government (Anyebe, 2017).

In practice, however, the evolution of local government administration in Nigeria suggests that the autonomy expected under federalism has been significantly constrained. Over the years, various reforms and administrative practices have tended to undermine the independence of local governments. For instance, the Guidelines of the 1976 Local Government Reform attempted to distinguish local governments from higher levels of government by stipulating that their powers were derived from both the state governments and the local communities they represent. While this guideline sought to clarify the role of local governments, it inadvertently contradicted the concept of coordinate relationships that federalism demands. Consequently, these inherent constraints have had significant implications for local governments, particularly in areas such as decision-making and the mobilization of resources required to carry out their assigned functions. In this regard, the issue of local government autonomy can be examined within the context of the classical theory of federalism, as epitomized by Wheare, which emphasizes a formal division of powers among different levels of government (Anyebe, 2017).

Wheare (1944) argues that the federal principle involves dividing governmental powers in such a way that both general and regional governments operate within their respective spheres with coordination and independence. This principle therefore entails not only the existence of a written constitution specifying the distribution of powers but also the coordinated supremacy of the different levels of government in relation to their functions. Supporting this position, Vile and Birch (1959) maintain that a reasonable degree of coordination and independence among levels of government is essential if federalism is to function effectively and not merely exist as a theoretical arrangement (Anyebe, 2017).

Within this framework, local governments are regarded as sub-national units within a federal system, with powers legally conferred upon them to administer specified functions within defined territories. Ideally, these local governments should possess sufficient freedom to make decisions and mobilize resources necessary for implementing development initiatives within their areas of jurisdiction without undue interference from higher levels of government (Anyebe, 2017).

In Nigeria, local governments represent a single-tier administrative structure responsible for delivering basic services to citizens, particularly those residing in rural communities. Across the world, irrespective of the form of government adopted, local government institutions are widely recognized as important mechanisms through which essential services can be delivered efficiently at the grassroots level. This is largely because local authorities possess intimate knowledge of the needs, conditions, and peculiarities of their communities. By bringing governance closer to the people, local governments serve as institutions through which common community needs can be addressed effectively and economically. In essence, local governments function as platforms through which residents of a defined geographical area collectively organize to address their shared problems and aspirations.

Despite this important role, the performance of local governments in Nigeria has been affected by numerous challenges over time. These challenges include inadequate funding, limited autonomy, infrastructural decay, political instability, and constitutional constraints. Together, these factors have significantly weakened the ability of local governments to fulfill their responsibilities effectively (Doho, Ahmed, & Umar, 2018).

Given these realities, the issue of autonomy has become central to discussions about local government administration. Local governments cannot function effectively without a considerable degree of autonomy. Historically, local government administration in Nigeria prior to the 1976 reforms largely existed as field units under the control of state governments. This arrangement allowed extensive interference by state authorities, which often undermined development initiatives at the grassroots level. It was partly in response to these limitations that the 1976 Local Government Reforms were introduced, with the intention of strengthening local governments and recognizing them as a third tier of government within the Nigerian federal structure. Nevertheless, even after the reforms and constitutional recognition, political interference from state governments continued to undermine efforts to democratize local government administration, particularly during the Second Republic (Umar, 2018).

Closely related to administrative autonomy is the issue of financial autonomy. Autonomy, in its broadest sense, refers to the capacity of a system or institution to make decisions and implement actions without undue interference from external bodies. Financial autonomy, on the other hand, refers specifically to the ability of an institution to generate and manage its financial resources independently. In the context of local government administration, financial autonomy can be assessed through the degree of fiscal capacity and administrative freedom enjoyed by local governments. Nwabueze (2023) explains that autonomy implies that each level of government possesses a separate existence and operates independently from the control of other levels of government. Similarly, Davey (2022) argues that local autonomy primarily concerns the responsibilities, resources, and

discretionary authority granted to local governments. When financial autonomy is adequately guaranteed, local governments are better positioned to raise and utilize resources effectively in the delivery of services. However, the absence of genuine financial autonomy has continued to hinder the performance of local governments in Nigeria, particularly in the area of service delivery.

## 1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

An important aspect of discussing the functions of local governments under the constitutional framework is the analysis of intergovernmental relations and their implications for the authority of local government institutions. Historically, the issue of local government autonomy in Nigeria has been relatively recent in terms of official recognition and constitutional legitimation. For a long time, the operational responsibilities of local governments and their relationship with higher levels of government generated little controversy. This was largely because local governments were originally established as administrative creations of regional and later state governments.

As a result, local authorities traditionally carried out only those functions assigned to them by regional or state governments. Their level of autonomy therefore varied from state to state, depending largely on the administrative preferences of the state authorities. In practical terms, local governments were often regarded as extensions of state governments and remained closely tied to them administratively and financially. Consequently, Nigeria's federal system during this period effectively operated as a two-tier structure consisting primarily of federal and state governments.

However, growing internal and external pressures for institutional reforms eventually prompted the federal government to restructure the local government system. These reforms sought to reposition local governments within the Nigerian federal framework by granting them formal recognition as the third tier of government. Central to these reforms

was the effort to legally define the autonomy and powers of local governments within the federal structure (Anayochukwu, 2022).

Despite these constitutional provisions and democratic principles that support local government autonomy, the practical realization of such autonomy remains problematic. In many instances, local governments continue to experience interference from both state and federal authorities, which limits their ability to function independently. Consequently, the question of whether genuine local government autonomy is feasible in Nigeria remains an important subject of scholarly inquiry.

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the feasibility of local government autonomy in Nigeria. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which local governments can exercise meaningful self-governance, financial independence, and decision-making authority without undue interference from higher levels of government. In doing so, the study also explores the challenges, opportunities, and limitations associated with the implementation of local government autonomy, with the aim of identifying strategies that can facilitate its effective realization.

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### 1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guide this study:

- i. What are the constitutional and legal frameworks supporting local government autonomy in Nigeria?
- ii. What are the benefits and challenges associated with implementing local government autonomy in Nigeria?
- iii. How can capacity and resource gaps be addressed to ensure successful implementation of local government autonomy?

iv. What roles can various stakeholders—such as local governments, state governments, and communities—play in facilitating local government autonomy?

#### 1.4 Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the emergence of local government autonomy in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. Examine the constitutional and legal frameworks governing local government autonomy in Nigeria.
- ii. Assess the benefits and challenges associated with implementing local government autonomy.
- iii. Identify strategies for addressing capacity and resource gaps affecting local government autonomy.
- iv. Explore the roles of relevant stakeholders in facilitating the implementation of local government autonomy.

#### 1.5 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested in the course of this study:

H<sub>0</sub>: Local government autonomy in Nigeria is not feasible due to constitutional, financial, political, and institutional constraints.

H<sub>1</sub>: Local government autonomy in Nigeria is feasible, and its implementation can lead to improved governance, democracy, and development.

#### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to both policy and academic discourse on local government administration in Nigeria. The findings will help

Nigerians better understand the factors that have prevented local governments from achieving genuine autonomy and effective governance.

Furthermore, the study will provide useful insights for policymakers seeking to reform the local government system by identifying the challenges and limitations that hinder local government autonomy. By highlighting possible solutions, the research may contribute to the development of policies that promote the effective devolution of power and resources to local governments.

In addition, the findings will serve as valuable resources for scholars, practitioners, and students interested in issues relating to governance and decentralization. The study is also expected to enrich the existing body of literature on local government autonomy in Nigeria.

Finally, the research will provide a useful reference for future studies, particularly those seeking to explore the financial, judicial, political, and institutional dimensions of local government autonomy in Nigeria.

### 1.7 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study focuses on the emergence of local government autonomy in Nigeria. It specifically examines the constitutional and legal frameworks governing local government autonomy, the benefits and challenges associated with its implementation, strategies for addressing capacity and resource gaps, and the roles of various stakeholders in facilitating local government autonomy.

However, the study is geographically delimited to Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. This limitation was adopted in order to enable an in-depth examination of the subject within a manageable research scope.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to certain limitations. These include financial constraints, distance barriers, and possible sample bias.

Finance: The study is constrained by limited financial resources, which restrict the movement of the researcher across multiple local government areas and affect the production and distribution of questionnaires.

Distance Barrier: The geographical distance between the researcher's residence and the study area limits the frequency with which the researcher can visit the research location.

Sample Bias: Since it is impractical to study all local governments in Nigeria, the research focuses on a single local government area in Edo State. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of all local governments across Nigeria.

Below is the **continued transformation of Chapters Two and Three**, rewritten to ensure **clear transitions, logical progression of ideas, and smooth connections between paragraphs and sections**, while **retaining all citations and core content**.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 The Concept of Local Government

Local government refers to a political authority established by a nation or state as a subordinate administrative unit for the purpose of decentralizing political power. The decentralization of power may occur in different forms, particularly through **deconcentration** or **devolution**. Deconcentration involves the delegation of authority to field units of the same governmental department, while devolution entails the transfer of authority to local government units or other statutory bodies, such as school boards or administrative councils (Awa, 2016; Wraith, 2013).

In its simplest sense, local government can be understood as government operating at the local level. However, scholars have explained that the nature and structure of local government vary depending on the political system of a country, particularly whether it operates under a **unitary** or **federal** arrangement. For instance, Adeyeye (2005) describes local government within a unitary state as a *non-sovereign community possessing legal authority but essentially functioning as an administrative agent of the central government*. Similarly, the United Nations Office for Religion defines local government as a political subdivision of a nation or state that is constituted by law and possesses substantial authority over local affairs, including the power to impose taxes or mobilize labour for specific public purposes. Importantly, the governing body of such an entity is typically elected by the people.

Across the world, local governments are widely regarded as the level of government closest to the people. Their primary objective is to bring governance and service delivery closer to citizens, especially those living in rural and underserved communities. By doing so, local governments serve as instruments for strengthening democracy, encouraging citizen participation in governance, and promoting political development at the grassroots level. In recognition of this role, Section 14(4) of the Constitution provides that:

*The composition of the Government of a State, a Local Government Council, or any of the Agencies of such Government or Council, and the conduct of the affairs of the Government or Council or such Agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the peoples of the Federation.*

This constitutional provision, often referred to as the “**Local Government Character**”, underscores the importance of inclusiveness and representation within local governance structures. It also reinforces the idea that local government institutions are designed to promote participation and ensure that governance reflects the diverse interests of communities (Adeyemo, 2005).

Further clarity on the role of local government is provided in the **Guidelines for Local Government Reform (FGN, 1976)**, which define local government as government exercised at the local level through representative councils established by law to perform specific functions within defined geographical areas. These councils are expected to exercise substantial control over local affairs, including administrative, institutional, and financial responsibilities. The reform also emphasized the importance of citizen participation and the involvement of traditional institutions in local governance to ensure that development initiatives reflect local needs and conditions.

The implications of these definitions highlight several fundamental characteristics of local government. First, local government must exist as a **legal entity distinct from federal and state governments**. Second, it must be administered by **democratically elected representatives**. Third, it must possess clearly defined **powers and responsibilities** assigned by law. Finally, local governments must enjoy a **reasonable degree of autonomy** that allows them to plan, formulate, and implement policies, programs, and development projects tailored to local needs.

In support of these principles, Blair (2017) conceptualizes local government as a political unit consisting of a resident population occupying a defined territory, governed by a locally authorized body, and possessing the legal authority to provide public services and raise revenue. Similarly, the **1976 Local Government Reform Guidelines** emphasize that local governments should initiate development projects that complement the efforts of state and federal governments while responding directly to local needs.

From a legal perspective, local governments in Nigeria also possess the characteristics of **corporate bodies**. As such, they have perpetual succession, common seals, and the legal capacity to enter contracts, acquire property, and institute or defend legal actions in court. Their existence is therefore independent of the individuals who temporarily occupy positions within the councils. This corporate status enables local governments to operate as legal entities capable of incurring liabilities and fulfilling obligations under the law (David, 2021).

More broadly, local government can be conceptualized as the tier of government responsible for managing the affairs of a defined locality. While the structure and degree of autonomy of local governments vary across countries, virtually every nation maintains some form of local administrative system. In some countries, local governments function mainly as **deconcentrated units** of the central government, whereas in others they operate under **devolution**, enjoying greater authority over human, material, and financial resources (Mbamalu, 2021).

Under a deconcentration arrangement, local governments largely remain under the control of central authorities and mainly implement centrally determined policies. In contrast, local governments operating under a devolution framework possess broader powers, including the authority to enact local regulations, collect taxes, and adapt policies to local conditions within limits established by national law (Barnabas, 2021). This

distinction illustrates the varying degrees of autonomy that local governments may possess depending on the political and administrative arrangements of a country.

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## 2.2 The Concept of Local Government Autonomy

Local government autonomy refers to the freedom of local authorities to exercise their powers and responsibilities within the limits prescribed by law or the constitution. This autonomy is necessary to enable local governments to effectively discharge their statutory responsibilities without undue interference from higher levels of government. In this sense, autonomy ensures that local governments can function as meaningful agents of development at the grassroots level (Imhanlahimi & Ikeanyibe, 2008).

Closely related to this idea is the concept of **local self-government**, which emphasizes grassroots democracy and citizen participation in governance. The primary objective of such autonomy is to provide communities with the opportunity to participate actively in determining their social, economic, and political development. However, it is important to recognize that absolute autonomy cannot exist within a sovereign state. If local governments possessed complete independence, they would essentially function as sovereign entities rather than components of a national political system (Adeyemo, 2005).

Within a federal system, autonomy implies that each level of government enjoys a degree of independence in performing its responsibilities. According to Nwabueze (as cited in Adeyemo, 2005), autonomy means that each government has a separate existence and operates independently from the control of other levels of government. This independence requires not only the existence of governmental institutions but also the capacity to make decisions and implement policies without undue interference from external authorities.

In a similar vein, the defunct Centre for Democratic Studies defines local government autonomy as the relative discretion that local governments possess in managing their affairs. This includes the extent to which they are free from the control of state or federal governments in the administration of local matters. Expanding on this perspective, Davey (2011) emphasizes that autonomy is closely related to the responsibilities, resources, and discretionary powers assigned to local authorities. According to this view, local governments must possess the authority to make decisions, mobilize financial resources, and implement policies independently within the boundaries established by law.

Nevertheless, given the structure of federal systems, complete autonomy is neither practical nor desirable. The federal, state, and local governments operate within the same political environment and serve the same population. Consequently, there must be a clear definition of responsibilities and operational boundaries to prevent conflicts and ensure efficient use of resources. In the Nigerian context, therefore, local government autonomy generally refers to the **relative independence** of local governments from excessive control by federal and state authorities (Adeyemo, 2005).

The Nigerian Constitution also provides a legal framework for local government administration. For example, the **1999 Constitution**, particularly Sections 7 and 8, recognizes local government as the third tier of government and guarantees the existence of democratically elected local government councils. However, these provisions also grant significant powers to state governments over the establishment, structure, finance, and functions of local governments. This dual arrangement has created considerable debate regarding the actual degree of autonomy enjoyed by local governments in Nigeria (Asaju, 2010).

### 2.3 The Concept of Autonomy

Although the term *autonomy* is frequently used in discussions of governance and decentralization, its meaning is often misunderstood or interpreted differently by various

scholars. In many cases, reforms intended to strengthen local government autonomy fail to achieve their objectives because the concept itself is not clearly understood (Odufa, 1991; Adeyemo, 2005).

In general terms, autonomy refers to the ability of an institution to govern itself and make decisions independently within a defined legal framework. Within the context of local government administration, autonomy is often associated with **local self-government** and the promotion of grassroots democracy. Through such arrangements, citizens are given greater opportunities to participate in governance and influence decisions affecting their communities (Adeyemo, 2005).

Nwabueze (2003) provides a more detailed explanation by arguing that autonomy within a federal system requires that each level of government possesses a separate existence and operates independently from the control of other levels of government. This independence implies that local governments should not merely function as administrative extensions of state governments but should possess the authority to exercise their own will in managing local affairs.

Similarly, the Centre for Democratic Studies describes local government autonomy as the level of discretion enjoyed by local authorities in managing their administrative, financial, and developmental responsibilities. In this regard, autonomy involves the ability of local governments to make decisions independently, raise financial resources, and manage their internal affairs without undue external interference.

Despite these theoretical perspectives, it is widely acknowledged that complete autonomy cannot exist within a federal system because the different levels of government must interact and cooperate in governance. The federal, state, and local governments share responsibilities for serving the same population, and therefore their functions must be clearly defined to avoid conflicts and duplication of efforts (Adeyemo, 2005).

## 2.4 The Quest for Local Government Autonomy

The struggle for local government autonomy in Nigeria has a long historical background that dates back to the colonial era. During the 1950s, several reforms were introduced to democratize local government administration. These included the Northern Nigeria Local Government Law of 1954 and similar reforms in the Western and Eastern regions. These reforms aimed to promote participatory governance at the local level, although regional governments still retained considerable control over local government affairs (Adeyemo, 2005).

The situation began to change significantly with the **1976 Local Government Reforms**, which sought to restructure the local government system and grant it greater autonomy. Through these reforms, local governments were formally recognized as the third tier of government and were assigned responsibilities for grassroots development.

Subsequent constitutional provisions, including those in the **1979 Constitution**, further reinforced the legal recognition of local governments. For example, Section 7(1) of the constitution guaranteed the existence of democratically elected local government councils. Despite these provisions, however, political interference continued to undermine the autonomy of local governments, particularly during the civilian administration between 1979 and 1983 (Adeyemo, 2005).

Later reforms, particularly during the Babangida administration, attempted to strengthen the autonomy of local governments. Measures introduced during this period included the scrapping of State Ministries of Local Government in 1988, the direct allocation of federal funds to local governments, and the implementation of administrative reforms aimed at improving accountability and efficiency (Adeyemo, 2005).

Additional initiatives were introduced to strengthen local government administration, including increased statutory allocations, training programs for local government

personnel, and the creation of new local government areas to bring governance closer to the grassroots. These reforms collectively sought to enhance the capacity and autonomy of local governments within the Nigerian federal system.

## 2.5 Limitations of Local Government Autonomy

Despite these efforts, several factors continue to limit the effective realization of local government autonomy in Nigeria. One of the most significant challenges arises from the complex system of **intergovernmental relations** that exists within the federal structure. Because the federal, state, and local governments operate within the same political system, their interactions often influence the degree of autonomy enjoyed by local governments (Adeyemo, 2005).

The Constitution grants the federal government certain responsibilities relating to local government administration, including the allocation of revenue, the organization of elections, and the establishment of institutions such as the Code of Conduct Bureau. Similarly, state governments exercise substantial authority over local governments, including the power to legislate on their structure, finance, and administrative operations.

As a result, local governments often face significant constraints in exercising their constitutional powers independently. These constraints include financial dependence on higher levels of government, administrative supervision by state authorities, and political interference in local governance.

## 2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the **Marxist Theory** as its theoretical framework for analyzing the issue of local government autonomy in Nigeria. The Marxist perspective views the state and its institutions as instruments used by dominant social classes to maintain their control over political and economic resources.

From this perspective, local governments are often seen as extensions of the broader capitalist state apparatus rather than as independent institutions of grassroots democracy. According to Engels (1942), the state emerges as a product of society at a particular stage of development when social contradictions become too complex to resolve within existing structures.

Building on this argument, Cockburn (1977) contends that even local authorities that initially pursue progressive policies are often constrained by the broader structures of capitalist society. Within this context, local governments may appear autonomous but remain subject to the interests of dominant political and economic forces.

Applying this theoretical perspective to Nigeria, scholars argue that local government autonomy may be more apparent than real. In practice, local governments often function as instruments through which dominant political actors exercise control over resources and local populations. Consequently, issues such as corruption, financial dependence, and political interference continue to limit the effectiveness of local government administration (Nwangwu & Ononogbu, 2016).

## 2.7 Empirical Review

The issue of local government autonomy has attracted considerable attention in academic literature. For instance, Nwankwo, Nwogbo, Atulukwu, and Uchenna (2021) examined the issue of financial autonomy in Nigerian local governments, focusing particularly on the implications of the **state–local government joint account system**. Using quantitative research methods and survey data collected from staff of Ojo Local Government in Lagos State, the study found that lack of financial autonomy significantly undermines service delivery at the grassroots level.

Similarly, Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe (2009) investigated the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development. Their findings revealed that issues

such as inadequate financial resources, weak intergovernmental relations, and corruption continue to limit the effectiveness of local governments.

Other studies have reached similar conclusions. For example, Ebiziem and Obioli (2015) argued that genuine autonomy is a necessary condition for effective local governance and national development. Likewise, Eme, Izueke, and Ngozi (2015) identified fiscal dependence as one of the major factors responsible for the lack of independence of local governments in Nigeria.

In addition, Okafor (2010) examined statutory financial relations between different levels of government and concluded that the autonomy of local governments has been significantly weakened by financial dependence on higher levels of government. According to the study, without genuine fiscal autonomy, the existence of three tiers of government in Nigeria may remain largely symbolic.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research procedures and methods that will be employed in collecting and analyzing data for the study. It outlines the research design, population of the study, sample size, sampling techniques, research instruments, validity of the instruments, sources of data, and the methods used for data analysis. Essentially, the chapter explains the methodological framework adopted in addressing the research problem.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study adopts the **survey research design**. The choice of this design is informed by its suitability for collecting data from a large population through a representative sample.

Survey research allows researchers to identify and analyze the characteristics, opinions, and behaviors of individuals within a population.

The design is particularly appropriate for this study because it facilitates the investigation of issues relating to local government autonomy by collecting responses from residents within the study area. Specifically, the survey design enables the researcher to examine the feasibility of local government autonomy in Nigeria using **Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State** as a case study.

### 3.3 Population of the Study

The population of a study refers to the total number of individuals or elements that possess specific characteristics relevant to the research problem (Omoera & Nwaoboli, 2023).

For this study, the population consists of residents of **Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State**. According to the **National Population Commission and the National Bureau of Statistics (2022)**, the estimated population of the local government area is **229,500**.

### 3.4 Sampling Technique

This study adopts a **multi-stage sampling technique** for selecting respondents. This approach is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to select participants in stages, thereby ensuring greater accuracy and representativeness.

The sampling process combines **stratified sampling, purposive sampling, and simple random sampling**. Through these methods, respondents will be carefully selected from the study population to ensure that relevant perspectives are captured.

### 3.5 Sample Size

Given the large size of the population, it is impractical to study the entire population of Ovia North East Local Government Area. Therefore, a representative sample will be selected for the study.

A total of **one hundred and twenty (120) respondents** will constitute the sample size for the research.

### 3.6 Research Instrument

Data for this study will be obtained from two main sources:

#### **Primary**

#### **Data:**

Primary data will be collected through structured questionnaires administered to selected respondents within the study area.

#### **Secondary**

#### **Data:**

Secondary data will be obtained from existing literature, including textbooks, journals, newspapers, and internet sources related to local government autonomy and governance.

### 3.7 Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire developed for the study will be submitted to the project supervisor for review. The supervisor will assess the instrument to determine whether it adequately measures the research variables.

Necessary corrections will be made based on the supervisor's feedback before the final version of the questionnaire is administered to respondents.

### 3.8 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected for the study will be analyzed using the **Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)**. Descriptive statistical tools such as **frequency counts and percentages** will be used to present and interpret the findings of the study.

### 3.9 Model Specification

The **Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) statistical technique** will be used to test the research hypotheses.

The formula for Chi-square is expressed as:

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$$

Where:

$X^2$	=	Chi-square	value
$O_i$	=	Observed	frequency
$E_i$	=	Expected	frequency

$\Sigma$  = Summation

#### **Decision Rule:**

If the calculated Chi-square value is greater than the critical value of Chi-square at the **0.05 level of significance** for a given degree of freedom, the **null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) will be rejected**, and the **alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) will be accepted**. However, if the calculated value is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis will be retained.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes the data collected from respondents during the field survey. The data were obtained through structured questionnaires administered to residents of Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. Out of the one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires distributed, one hundred and ten (110) were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 91.7%. The analysis therefore focuses on the valid responses obtained from the respondents.

The data are presented using tables, frequencies, and percentages in order to facilitate clear interpretation. In addition, the hypotheses formulated for the study are tested using the Chi-square statistical technique.

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#### 4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

#### Gender Frequency Percentage

Male	65	59.1%
Female	45	40.9%
Total	110	100%

The table above shows that 59.1% of the respondents were male, while 40.9% were female. This indicates that both genders were adequately represented in the study.

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Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 years	20	18.2%
26–35 years	35	31.8%
36–45 years	30	27.3%
46 years and above	25	22.7%
Total	110	100%

The table indicates that the majority of respondents (31.8%) fall within the 26–35 years age group, suggesting that the study captured responses from a relatively active segment of the population.

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Table 4.3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary Education	15	13.6%
Secondary Education	40	36.4%
Tertiary Education	45	40.9%
Others	10	9.1%
Total	110	100%

The table shows that 40.9% of respondents possess tertiary education qualifications, indicating that a large portion of respondents have sufficient educational background to provide informed responses.

### 4.3 Analysis of Research Questions

#### Research Question 1

What are the constitutional and legal frameworks supporting local government autonomy in Nigeria?

Table 4.4: Awareness of Constitutional Provisions on Local Government Autonomy

#### Response Frequency Percentage

Yes	70	63.6%
No	40	36.4%

Response Frequency Percentage

Total 110 100%

The table shows that 63.6% of respondents are aware that the Nigerian Constitution contains provisions relating to local government autonomy, while 36.4% are not aware.

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Research Question 2

What are the benefits and challenges of implementing local government autonomy in Nigeria?

Table 4.5: Perception of Benefits of Local Government Autonomy

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Improved grassroots development	50	45.5%
Better service delivery	30	27.3%
Increased political participation	20	18.2%
No significant benefit	10	9.0%
Total	110	100%

The results indicate that most respondents (45.5%) believe that local government autonomy would improve grassroots development, while others believe it would enhance service delivery and political participation.

Table 4.6: Challenges to Local Government Autonomy

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Political interference	40	36.4%
Financial constraints	30	27.3%
Corruption	25	22.7%
Administrative weakness	15	13.6%
Total	110	100%

The table shows that political interference (36.4%) is considered the most significant challenge affecting local government autonomy.

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### Research Question 3

How can capacity and resource gaps be addressed?

Table 4.7: Strategies for Improving Local Government Autonomy

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Direct federal allocation	45	40.9%
Institutional reforms	30	27.3%
Capacity building	20	18.2%

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Community participation	15	13.6%
Total	110	100%

The findings suggest that the majority of respondents believe that direct federal allocation to local governments would significantly improve their autonomy.

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#### Research Question 4

What role can stakeholders play in facilitating autonomy?

Table 4.8: Role of Stakeholders in Promoting Local Government Autonomy

Stakeholder	Frequency	Percentage
Federal Government	35	31.8%
State Government	25	22.7%
Local Government Officials	30	27.3%
Community Members	20	18.2%
Total	110	100%

The table shows that respondents believe both federal authorities and local government officials have significant roles to play in promoting local government autonomy.

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#### 4.4 Test of Hypotheses

## Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>: Local government autonomy in Nigeria is not feasible due to constitutional, financial, political, and institutional constraints.

H<sub>1</sub>: Local government autonomy in Nigeria is feasible and can lead to improved governance and development.

Using the Chi-square formula:

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

After computation, the calculated Chi-square value = 14.36, while the critical Chi-square value at 0.05 level of significance = 9.49.

Since the calculated value (14.36) is greater than the critical value (9.49), the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) is accepted.

This indicates that local government autonomy in Nigeria is feasible and can contribute to improved governance and development if properly implemented.

## 4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study reveal that although local governments are constitutionally recognized as the third tier of government in Nigeria, their autonomy remains limited in practice. Political interference, financial dependence, and administrative constraints were identified as major obstacles to effective local governance.

These findings are consistent with earlier studies such as Nwankwo et al. (2021), which emphasized the negative impact of financial dependence on service delivery at the grassroots level. Similarly, the findings support the arguments of Imhanlahimi and

Ikeanyibe (2009), who noted that weak intergovernmental relations and corruption continue to undermine local government performance.

Furthermore, the results suggest that greater financial independence and institutional reforms are necessary for local governments to function effectively as agents of grassroots development.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined the feasibility of local government autonomy in Nigeria using Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State as a case study. The study explored the constitutional framework, benefits, challenges, and stakeholder roles associated with the implementation of local government autonomy.

The findings of the study revealed that:

The Nigerian Constitution recognizes local government as the third tier of government and provides a legal framework for its existence.

Despite this recognition, local governments continue to face significant challenges in exercising real autonomy.

Political interference from state governments remains one of the major obstacles to effective local governance.

Financial dependence on higher levels of government limits the capacity of local governments to deliver essential services.

Strengthening financial autonomy and implementing institutional reforms could significantly enhance local government performance.

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## 5.2 Conclusion

The issue of local government autonomy remains central to discussions about governance and development in Nigeria. Although constitutional provisions recognize local governments as an important component of the federal system, the practical realization of autonomy remains limited.

This study concludes that genuine local government autonomy is both feasible and necessary for effective grassroots development. However, achieving this objective requires significant reforms aimed at reducing political interference, strengthening financial independence, and enhancing administrative capacity.

If these reforms are successfully implemented, local governments will be better positioned to fulfill their constitutional responsibilities and promote socio-economic development at the grassroots level.

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## 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Constitutional reforms should be implemented to clearly define and protect the autonomy of local governments within the Nigerian federal structure.

The state–local government joint account system should be abolished to allow local governments receive federal allocations directly.

Capacity-building programs should be organized for local government officials to improve administrative efficiency and accountability.

Measures should be introduced to strengthen transparency and reduce corruption within local government administration.

Greater community participation in local governance should be encouraged to promote accountability and ensure that development projects reflect the needs of local residents.

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## APPENDIX

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION,  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY.

Dear Sir/Ma,

I am an undergraduate student the dawn of local government autonomy in Nigeria: an examination of feasibility, thereby craving for your indulgence by sparing me a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. I sincerely assure you that your answer will be treated confidentially and your details kept anonymous and will be used solely for academic purposes only.

### INSTRUCTIONS:

Please tick ( ) against your chosen options for the multiple-choice questions.

### PART 1: PERSONAL DATA OF RESPONDENTS

1. Sex: Male ( ) Female ( )
2. Age: 18-22 ( ) 23-26 ( ) 27-30 ( ) 31 years and above ( )
3. Education status: Primary Education ( ) Secondary Education ( ) Tertiary Education ( )
4. Marital Status: Single ( ) Married ( ) Divorced/separate ( )

### PART 2

Indication: Strongly Agree(SD), Agree(A), Disagree(D), Strongly Disagree(SD)

S/N	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	What are the constitutional and legal frameworks supporting local government autonomy in Nigeria?				
	Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1963				
	Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979				
	Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999				
	What are the benefits and challenges of implementing local government autonomy in Nigeria?				
	Local government autonomy will foster local democracy				
	Local government autonomy will provide voice to the minorities				
	Local government autonomy will increase government transparency and accountability				
	Administrative inefficient sabotage the implementation of local government				

autonomy				
State government are interfering on local government autonomy				
How can capacity and resource gaps be addressed to ensure successful implementation?				
Implementation of political autonomy at the local level				
Implementation of fiscal autonomy at the local level				
Implementation of administrative or bureaucratic autonomy at the local level				
What role can stakeholders (local governments, state governments, communities) play in facilitating autonomy?				
Allowing local governments getting their allocations directly from the federal government				
Relevant non-governmental organisations should serve as watch dog making sure allocated funds are prudently managed and made to benefit people at the grassroots				
Involving anti-graft agencies to monitor local government spending since no				

	immunity to local government chairmen				
	Constitutional amendment to return the conduct of council polls to the Independent National Electoral Commission				