

**THE IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY ON GRASSROOTS
DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA**

BY

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**AN ORIGINAL RESEARCH ESSAY (PROJECT) SUBMITTED TO THE
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REQUIREMENTS OF THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE DEGREE
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was written and completed by **ABDULLAHI HARUNA** with the matriculation number: **SSC2105700**, student of the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin. The project represents an original piece of research carried out by the student under my supervision. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) Degree in Political Science.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Almighty God for His grace, wisdom, and strength throughout my academic journey. I sincerely dedicate this work to my late parents, Mr. and Mrs. Haruna.

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I am grateful to Almighty God for giving me the strength, patience, and wisdom to complete this project.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page	i
Certification	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of contents	vi
Abstract	viii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Research Objectives	5
1.5 Statement of the Research Hypothesis	6
1.6 Significance of the Study	6
1.7 Scope of the Study	8
1.8 Limitation of the Study	9
1.9 Definitions of Terms	9
References	10

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Conceptual Framework	11
2.3 Theoretical Framework	55
2.4 Empirical Review	60
2.5 Summary of Literature Review	62
References	64

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	67
3.2 Research Design	67
3.3 Population of the Study	67
3.4 Sample Size and Sample Techniques	68
3.5 Method of Data Collection	68
3.6 Research Instrument	68
3.7 Validity of Instrument	69
3.8 Method of Data Analysis	69
References	70

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction	71
4.2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	71
4.3 Presentation of Responses to Research Questions	72
4.4 Summary of Findings	75
4.5 Discussion of Findings	76
References	77

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary	78
5.2 Conclusion	78
5.3 Policy Recommendations	79
References	81
Appendix	82
Bibliography	86

ABSTRACT

This study looks at how local government autonomy affects Nigerian grassroots democracy. It looks at how local political, administrative, and financial autonomy impacts accountability, service delivery, and citizen involvement. A survey of 150 people in Nigeria (Edo State, Benin City) was used in the study; 136 of the questionnaires were returned, and descriptive statistics were used for analysis. The results show that although excessive state intervention lowers citizen engagement and responsibility, inadequate autonomy prevents local governments from successfully serving the needs of their communities. In order to deepen grassroots democracy and advance sustainable development, the study comes to the conclusion that local governments can be empowered through administrative, financial, and legal reforms. Improvements to oversight procedures, increased community involvement in local governance, and fiscal independence are among the recommendations.

Keywords: Local government, autonomy, grassroots democracy, Nigeria, governance

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As the level of government closest to the people, local government is essential for promoting grassroots democracy. Local government autonomy has been hotly debated in Nigeria, though, because state governments frequently meddle in their financial, administrative, and decision-making affairs. Local council performance has suffered as a result, which has an impact on development and grassroots democracy. Encouraging citizen participation, accountability, and openness at the local level depends critically on the degree to which local governments are able to independently make choices, carry out programs, and manage resources.

Local government institutions differ significantly between nations, and even in cases when comparable arrangements are in place, the nomenclature frequently varies. Local government entities are often referred to as states, prefectures, districts, municipalities, shires, and so on. Nonetheless, local government is the legitimate branch of central government, and all of these designations are frequently used colloquially in many nations.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1979 Constitution's Section 7(1) ensures that local government councils be democratically elected. Even under General Ibrahim Babangida's military rule in 1986, some measures were implemented to increase local government

autonomy. The federal government's 1988 abolition of the State Ministries of Local Government was one significant change that lessened the political meddling and bureaucratic control that had impeded local governance. The extent to which these reforms have improved local government autonomy in Nigeria is still debatable, notwithstanding these efforts.

1. The Constitutional Issue

A State Joint Local Government Account is made possible by the 1999 Constitution, namely Sections 162(6) and (8). This approach enables local councils to collect and disburse federal funding to state governments. In actuality, it grants state governors undue authority over the budget of municipal governments. Because of this, money intended for grassroots development is frequently misused, delayed, or misdirected, which lowers accountability and transparency. (Eme & Onyishi, 2014; Oviasuyi, Idada & Isiraojie, 2010) This constitutional clause has led to ongoing underdevelopment at the grassroots level and undermined the fiscal independence of local governments.

2. State–Local Government Joint Projects

Governors in several states force local governments to take part in collaborative projects that don't really address local issues. Local governments are compelled to devote funds on state-directed initiatives that are frequently abandoned or inadequately carried out rather than starting community-driven projects. Local officials seldom have the authority to oppose such orders because the state is essential to the local government's political and financial survival. The foundation of local initiative and grassroots democracy is compromised by this reliance (Agagu, 2004; Ola & Tonwe, 2009).

3. Appointment of Caretaker Committees

The regular appointment of caretaker committees by state governors to replace elected local government officials is another significant issue. This method deprives citizens of their right to select their leaders and goes against democratic ideals. Since appointed guardians frequently serve governors rather than the people, local government

is merely a continuation of state political power. According to Eneanya (2012) and Eme & Onyishi (2014), this has degraded accountability, decreased citizen involvement, and transformed local councils from agents of development into political instruments.

4. Conduct of Local Government Elections

State governments control the majority of state electoral commissions, despite the constitution's provision for elections to local governments. Elections frequently yield lopsided results, with candidates from the state's ruling party winning by a large margin. In addition to discouraging local political competition, this weakens the spirit of democracy. According to Oviasuyi et al. (2010) and Ola & Tonwe (2009), local governments' reliance on state executives is further strengthened by election manipulation.

5. Control Over Local Government Staffing

At the municipal level, state governments continue to have control over hiring. Local chairmen have little control over their staff because governors have a say in hiring, posting, and promoting local government employees. Poor service delivery, low productivity, and bloated workforces are the results of this. Additionally, it deters local government workers from being dedicated, competent, and professional (Agagu, 2004; Eneanya, 2012).

In general, Nigerian local government authority is still mainly symbolic. State administrations are able to keep strict control over local councils thanks to established administrative and constitutional frameworks. This has hindered national development, reduced grassroots involvement, and undermined local institutions (Eme & Onyishi, 2014; Oviasuyi et al., 2010).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

An important topic in Nigeria's democratic growth for a long time has been local government autonomy. Although local councils were supposed to be given independence by the 1976 Local Government Reform and later constitutional provisions, the actual situation has been otherwise. The majority of local administrations are still subject to state oversight, particularly when it comes to financial and administrative issues. This

makes it more difficult for them to carry out their constitutional duties. State governments' ongoing meddling restricts local governments' ability to take independent action or launch initiatives that directly address the needs of the populace at large. Money intended for local development is frequently misdirected or delayed, which leads to subpar service delivery, low levels of citizen participation, and a decline in confidence in the democratic process.

This circumstance calls into question how much local government autonomy actually exists in Nigeria and how it impacts grassroots democracy. It is crucial to comprehend this relationship in order to evaluate whether the current local government structure actually promotes sustainable community development and democratic governance.

1.3 Research Questions

- i. What are the major challenges to achieving full local government autonomy?
- ii. To what extent does local government autonomy influence grassroots democracy in Nigeria?
- iii. How does the lack of autonomy affect citizen participation and service delivery at the local level?
- iv. What policy measures can enhance local government autonomy to promote democratic governance?

1.4 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study include:

- i. To examine the major challenges to achieve full local government autonomy.
- ii. To identify the extent to which local government autonomy influences grassroots democracy in Nigeria.
- iii. To assess how the lack of local government autonomy affects citizen participation and service delivery at the grassroots level.
- iv. To identify policy measures that can enhance local government autonomy and promote democratic governance.

1.5 Statement of the Research Hypothesis

The following theories can direct the investigation in light of the goals and research questions:

1. H₁: There are significant challenges that limit the achievement of full local government autonomy in Nigeria.
2. H₂: Local government autonomy positively influences grassroots democracy in Nigeria.
3. H₃: The lack of local government autonomy negatively affects citizen participation and the quality of service delivery at the local level.
4. H₄: Implementing appropriate policy measures can significantly enhance local government autonomy and strengthen democratic governance at the grassroots.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it looks at the connection between grassroots democracy and local government autonomy in Nigeria, a crucial issue for efficient governance and the advancement of the country. Policymakers, administrators, and citizens can find ways to fortify local institutions and enhance service delivery by comprehending how autonomy impacts local governance.

First, the research offers information for creating policies. Eme and Onyishi (2014) and Oviasuyi, Idada, and Isiraojie (2010) note the limitations on local government autonomy and provide suggestions for constitutional and administrative changes that would improve accountability, financial independence, and decision-making competence.

Officials from the local government gain from it as well. The results can be used to inform chairpersons and council members about the best ways to deal with government meddling while encouraging public involvement. Increasing local authority can enhance the design and execution of initiatives that directly meet community needs (Agagu, 2004; Eneanya, 2012).

Third, the research advances knowledge in academia. It closes gaps in the body of research on how local government autonomy affects grassroots democracy in Nigeria. This work can be expanded upon by future scholars to examine the efficacy of reforms and compare local government systems in different states or areas.

Lastly, it gives civil society organizations and individuals more authority. According to Ola and Tonwe (2009) and Eme and Onyishi (2014), residents can more successfully

advocate for accountability, transparency, and meaningful engagement in local governance if they are aware of the boundaries of local government autonomy.

All things considered, this study offers a thorough grasp of the benefits and difficulties associated with local government autonomy, encouraging more robust democratic governance and grassroots growth.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study looks at how grassroots democracy in Nigeria is affected by local government autonomy. It focuses on the administrative, budgetary, and legal frameworks that influence local governments' operations and their capacity to successfully involve the public. The impact of state governments on local decision-making, joint account financial control, caretaker committee appointments, local government election conduct, and staffing policies are important topics of analysis.

Instead of focusing on a single local government area, the study examines the entire nation, finding trends and issues that are prevalent in all states. It investigates the effects of limited autonomy on grassroots democratic governance, service delivery, and public participation. In order to evaluate the connection between local government autonomy and the advancement of grassroots democracy in Nigeria, the study draws on secondary sources, such as scholarly publications, official documents, and constitutional clauses.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

The study had a number of drawbacks, such as limited funding that prevented access to a bigger sample size and repeated trips to the research site. Due to the short academic schedule and other academic obligations, time constraints also presented a problem. Additionally, it was challenging to obtain correct data and access to important officials because some respondents were reluctant to divulge information.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Local Government: According to the local government reform handbook (1992), it is characterized as local government carried out by representative councils created by law to exercise particular functions within designated boundaries.

Autonomy: The Oxford Advance Learner Dictionary defines autonomy as the ability of a nation, a territory, or an organization to run its own affairs.

Local Government Autonomy: This is the ability of local governments to run their affairs and make decisions without undue intervention from the federal or state governments.

Grassroot Democracy: There is a propensity to create political procedures that transfer as much decision-making power as is feasible to the lowest social or geographic level of the organization.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of several studies carried out by exceptional academics and explains technology related to determining local government autonomy in Nigerian grassroots democracy. This chapter also provides an overview of the problem's history and current state, outlined by a succinct analysis of earlier research on closely related issues.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Local Government

It is impossible to fully comprehend Nigerian local government without looking at its development. Local government was practiced in pre-colonial Nigeria, although it was referred to by different names depending on the culture of the time. The fundamental goal of having a center and various sub-units is to essentially bring suburban government to the people. As a result, in the current democratic system, the local government existentially fulfills the same duty. Because it contributes to the decentralization and diffusion of democracy in the suburbs, the local government is a crucial level of governance.

There are 774 local government areas in Nigeria, with the majority located in the state's suburbs and a minor number in the metropolitan region (city state). Therefore,

without sub-units, a massive hallmark state like Nigeria is mostly unable to manage the enormous region. In Nigeria, it is yet unknown how much this concept evolved on its own. various academics have various definitions of municipal governments. This is a result of different viewpoints about the true function of local government, which varies depending on the context.

On the other hand, local governments are "government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas" (local Government Reform Handbook, 1992). Oni (1993) defined local government as the "level of government exercised, through representative council established by law to exercise geographical area with common social and political ties." These powers should grant the council significant authority over local affairs, as well as the staff, institutional, and financial authority to decide on and carry out projects that will supplement the efforts of the state and federal governments in their respective regions and to start and oversee the provision of services.

According to the US Department of Public Administration, it is "a political sub-division of a nation or state in a federal system which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes or exact labor for prescribed purpose." Abutudu (2011) defines local government as "a system of public administration at a local level which is constitutionally empowered to carry out specific function and provide services closest to the people."

Characteristics of Local Government

Almost all local government bodies share certain characteristics:

- That local government is a subordinate system of government
 - A continuing organization
 - The authority to undertake public activities
 - The ability to enter into contracts
 - The right to sue and be sued
 - The ability to collect taxes
 - Has the power to make policies, prepare budgets and have a measure of control over its own staff.

Reasons For Establishing Local Government

The following are the reasons for establishing local government(Eneanya,2012: 19-20):

- Local government gives people the ability to manage their own affairs in accordance with local requirements, goals, resources, and customs that they alone comprehend better than anybody from outside.
- Offers a structure for igniting and maintaining public fervor and initiative in development.
- In addition to acting as a two-way channel of communication between the local population and the central government.

- It also acts as a hedge against the overconcentration of power at the center, which frequently results in tyranny.
- It gathers local interests and relays them to the center, keeping the local population updated on policies and programs of the central government.
- New ideas for government structure and economic policies are tested in the socioeconomic laboratory of local government, which also acts as a training ground for national leadership roles.
-

Local Government Functions

Section 7(1) of the Fourth Schedule of the Nigerian constitutions of 1979, 1989, and 1999 explicitly acknowledges the roles of local governments as a third level of government. These roles include (quoted in Eneanya, 2012):

Mandatory Local Government Functions

- i. Rate collection (including tenement rates), television, radio, and licenses for non-mechanically driven vehicles (such as trucks and bicycles)
- ii. The construction and upkeep of cemeteries, burial sites, residences for the poor and sick, markets, motor parks, public amenities, roads, and recreational facilities (such as parks and playgrounds).
- iii. Building and maintaining streets, roads, drains, parks, gardens, open spaces, and other public highways, as well as any other amenities that the State House of Assembly may occasionally specify.

iii. Evaluating privately held homes or tenements in order to impose any fees that the Assembly of State may specify.

v. Numbering dwellings and naming streets and roads.

vi. Liquor sales licensing, regulation, and supervision.

vii. Management and control of outdoor advertisements, pots, stores, kiosks, eateries, and laundry facilities.

viii. All weddings, births, and deaths must be registered.

Functions in Which Local Governments are to Participate

i. State economic planning and development.

ii. Provision and maintenance of primary education services, adult and vocational education.

iii. Development of agriculture and natural resources (other than the exploitation of minerals)

iv. Provision and maintenance of health services.

v. Other functions as may be conferred on a local government council by the House of Assembly of the State.

Evolution of Local Government

Following the union of the northern and southern regions of the country in 1914, Nigeria has experimented with several local government structures. Nigerian local government administration has its roots in the pre-colonial era. Sokoto and Borno caliphates, including the Ibadan, Egba, Ekiti, and Oyo empires, were emirate systems. In these kingdoms, the leadership of their separate territories was dominated by Emirs, Obas, and Chiefs. Additionally, there were smaller wards, villages, and districts in these regions that were governed by the kingdom and emirate. Local government could be used to refer to these smaller or lower levels of governance. Next came the establishment of the British colonialist indirect rule system. Eventually, the indirect rule system gave way to direct rule since "the traditional rulers became mere local agents of colonial officers." In their respective territories, the Emirs in the North, the Obas in the West, and the Warrant chiefs in the East were the only indigenous leaders (Ugwu, 2000:8). A reform that solidified emirate control in the northern heartlands and regularized the Emirs' status as the sole native authorities was implemented in the 1930s. Both the West and the East saw somewhat similar changes. From one district to another, the pattern appears.

Native Administration

The Governor General served as the head of administration under the structures of Native Administration in the Northern Region and other regions of Nigeria. Including issues concerning the Native Administration, the Governor General was in charge of overseeing the territory's general policies. The Lieutenant Governors, who had their headquarters in Lagos and Kaduna, were in charge of the Northern and Southern Administrations. They were responsible for creating their regions' yearly budgets, which are then integrated into the central budget, among other things (Ugwu, 2000). Every region of the nation was given access to provincial government. It was only active in the North before this time. The South's number of provinces grew from three to nine. Among them were Benin, Oyo, Warri, Calabar, Ogoja, Ondo, Onitsha, Owerri, and Abeokuta. Every province was led by a resident who was in charge of overseeing the general operation of the public services within his area of responsibility.

The relevant Lieutenant-Governor was in charge of the Resident (Ugwu, 2000). Southern Nigeria was split into Eastern and Western provincial divisions under Sir Governor Bernard Bourdillion (1939–1943). The River Niger served as his boundary. Three groupings of provinces—Northern, Eastern, and Western—were in existence starting in 1939. Each was headed by a Lieutenant Governor, with headquarters located in Kaduna, Enugu, and Ibadan, respectively. There were Divisional Administrations in every province, led by District Officers (D.Os). For the most part, the District Officers

and Assistant District Officers were the officials in charge of carrying out government policies and, to a lesser degree, creating them. Separate Native administrative units of various sizes and kinds were situated beneath this arrangement. Indirect rule was the method used to run the native government.

In order to maintain law and order, collect taxes, provide services, and manage politics, the colonial government acknowledged and reinforced the role of traditional leaders and chiefs (Ugwu, 2000). Under the indirect rule system, the Native Administration was partially effective in the West, failed in the East, and successful in the North. Because the Igbo traditional political structure was decentralized, it failed in the East. In addition, the 1929 Aba Women Riot led to the adoption of the "Best Man Policy" due to the weakness of the indirect rule system. According to Ugwu (2000), the people chose their own delegates to the local councils and native courts, replacing warrant chiefs as the people's representatives in the council. Accordingly, the Native Administration was replaced in the southern part of Nigeria by representative local government, but it continued in the northern half of the country until 1966, when the first military intervention took place (Ugwu, 2000).

Growth of Local Government

In the North, the Native Administration system persisted until the advent of the contemporary local system between 1952 and 1965, as well as the period of Caretaker Committees and Sole Administrator Systems. When the state government was granted the power to establish local government, however, the number of local governments increased from 299 in 1970 to 301 in 1979 and then to 781 in 1981. There was a decrease to 301 following the fall of the civilian administration in 1984, followed by increases to 449 in 1987, 589 in 1991, and 774 in 1996 (Otobo 2022:32).

Local Government Reforms Before 1966

The colonial administration administered the grassroots through Indirect Rule through the Native Authorities (NA) prior to the 1950s. With Traditional Rulers' assistance, the NA functioned under the District Officer (DO). "Some notable reforms in the local government administration, mostly in the Southern part of Nigeria," were implemented throughout the 1950s (Ugwu, 2003: 14). The following were their administrative processes:

- The NAs collected taxes as the primary source of funding, keeping a portion for the upkeep of their services.

- The government approved the budget, which was created under the direction of the District Officer (DO).
- Early in the 1950s, Southern Nigeria fiercely opposed the system, and the Eastern Region government abolished native administration and replaced it with the Local Council Ordinance of 1950. The Local Council Law of 1952 was passed by the Western Region, and a similar law was passed by the Northern Region in 1954. The British local government system served as the model for the structure in the East. The construction had three levels, which were as follows:

(i) County (Divisional council)

(ii) District council

(iii) Local council

The reform stipulated that all council members would be chosen by popular vote. The three-tier system of local government was replaced with a two-tier structure: (a) the Urban and County Council and (b) the Local Councils, due to insufficient administration and insufficient experience to run this new system (Ugwu, 2000). The 1952 Western Regional Local Government Law in the Western area was prompted by the actions of the traditional rulers. The legislation established a three-level hierarchy, consisting of (a)

divisional offices, (b) district councils, and (c) local councils. With its maternity centers, hospitals, ambulance services, agriculture, veterinary and forestry services, and primary and post-primary education, this was similarly modeled after the British system (Ugwu, 2000). A deal was reached between the traditional rulers and the educated elites for the latter to receive 25% of the council's membership. Up to the First Republic's demise in 1966, the Native Administration system in the Northern Region endured and held firm.

- In 1955, Local Council Service Boards were established in southern Nigeria to control the authority of local officials when it came to hiring staff. Appointments in the North required the consent of the relevant regional minister of government (Ugwu, 2000).
- The statutes were modified in 1960 to reflect local experiences and contemporary regulations. Later, the Ministry of Local Council was established to improve personnel and financial inspection (Ugwu, 2000).

Local Government Reforms During Military Rule

After the military took control in 1966, Decree 34 eliminated the municipal government structure. With the dissolution of the local council police and their integration into the federal police force, the native court system was incorporated into the

judiciary. Additionally, Federal Prisons took over Native Authority Prisons. The councils' independence and authority were further undermined. Reforms implemented in the North under military rule led to:

(a) Increased scope of local participation

(b) establishing new administrative divisions and frameworks to encourage greater involvement as well as efficient resource mobilization and management for development objectives. The local government systems in the North, however, varied from state to state. The Kwara and Benue-Plateau states, for example, adopted a local administration structure that consists of district councils as subordinate units to local authorities. Other Northern states, including Kano, North-Central, North Eastern, and North Western, adopted a three-tiered structure consisting of the following:

(a) The local Authority

(b) The Administrative Area Council/ Area Development Board

(c) The District Council.

The three-tier buildings that were implemented in the 1950s in southern Nigeria were comparable to these constructions. Additionally, there was a Township Administration in places like Kano Township, which had a Metropolitan Planning Development Board; Borno in the Northeast; Zaria in the North Central; and New Bussa and Bacita in Kwara. A new type of local government administration was developed in the East Central States. It was referred to as the "Development Administration" system. The South Eastern and Midwestern states also had it (Ugwu, 2000). Community self-help is the foundation of the system's philosophy. The Divisional Administration Edict of 1971, however, had an impact on the system's reform. Divisional and Community Councils were established as a two-tier structure under this system.

At the divisional levels, the local government was represented by the Divisional officer-in-council of the Divisional council for a community council area and the Resident-in-council of the Urban council for an urban council region. Additionally, the system created a coordinating and administrative relationship between the state government and the community council as well as between the state government and regular citizens. This was done in an effort to lower the barrier between people and their surroundings and to bring the government closer to the people (Ugwu, 2000). The Council Manager method was implemented in the West. It was a North American concept. Its goal was to incorporate some methods from the private sector into management of the public sector. The Council Manager System's structure consisted of a

secretary who served as a company's top executive and a council of elected or appointed members who acted as a board of directors in a commercial organization.

Every council had a standing committee that was in charge of developing policies, creating and accepting yearly council budgets, and providing assistance to the secretary, who acted as the chief executive officer. The council members chose the chairman of the standing committee from among themselves each year, and he also served as the chairman of the council (Ugwu, 2000). The Eastern and Mid-West state administrations assumed control of local political institutions after 12 states were established in 1967. In the majority of the Northern States, public representation and the waning of conventional leadership's control on local councils were increasingly prioritized while the West adopted a North American type of council management system.

Local Government Reforms Since 1976 And Beyond

It was believed in 1976 that these reforms were insufficient to effect the kind of political and socioeconomic changes that local governments were hoping to achieve. A standardized framework for municipal councils across the federation was implemented in 1976. Roles in the administration of the councils were denied to traditional rulers. The council, which has a population of at least 150,000 and more than 800,000, was elevated to the third level of administration. The council was given specific responsibilities. With

the adoption of the presidential form of government in 1979, all of the 1976 reforms' provisions were integrated into the constitution (Ugwu, 2000). This 1976 reform reshaped local governments and shifted their focus from being state governments' field administrations to being concurrent local government entities answerable to the people. The reform brought about a very significant and inventive break from the nation's current organized system of local administration. The reform's salient features are:

- Dismantling the outdated divisional administration structure that was in use in a number of regions of the nation.
- Federal grants will be distributed to local governments via the states; a multipurpose, one-tier local authority with a chief executive system of management will be established.
- The establishment of supervisory council, especially in the Southern states. Each Supervisor was to oversee one or more relevant local council departments (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976; Ugwu, 2000).
- When the 1979 constitution gave the states the power to establish local government, the growth of local governments in the early 1980s nearly overshadowed the advancements made in local government reforms in 1976. As a result, the challenge of allocating few resources among a significantly larger number of local governments was exacerbated, and the limited ability for

governance at the local government level was emphasized. The issue of power separation between the branches of government, which is usually present in presidential systems of government, was also not addressed by the change. However, the 1979 Constitution included a presidential style of government, incorporating all the 1976 reforms' features (Ugwu, 2000).

Dasuki Local Government Review Committee of 1984

These glaring shortcomings led to the perception that the 1976 national local government changes were insufficiently effective in producing the intended effect. The Dasuki Local Government Review Committee was established as a result in 1984. The Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki Report of 1986 improved local council conditions (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1987). The exercise ultimately made the local government issue worse. Local governments were subservient to the states according to the government white paper. Local governments' external revenue was significantly cut. State governments were no longer required to provide the local government with more than 10% of its internal revenue (Akindele & Olaopa, 1998; Ugwu, 2000). With the appointment of sole administrators, who acted as representatives of the State governments, the local governments' subjugation to the States was finalized, and the benefits of the 1976 reform

were erased. In 1988, the state ministries of local council were abolished as a result of the suggestions, and the policy of direct distribution of statutory allocations was implemented (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1987; Eme & Onyishi, 2014).

Local Government Reform of 1988

The Federal government implemented several measures to fortify local government in 1988 in response to the suggestions made by a different Local Government Review Commission (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1988). The new actions were:

- Eliminating State Ministries of Local Government, which had broad oversight and review powers over local governments, and replacing them with a Local Government department within the Governor's office.
- Directly transferring federal funds to local governments. Statutory allocations, which have increased from 10% to 23%, avoid the state government.
- Giving local governments the power to create and approve their own budgets and taxes separately from state governments will strengthen their financial management.
- Local government organizations should be rationalized. Primary healthcare and education, along with all associated staff and facilities, should be transferred to local

government. Establishing a local government alarm committee and the position of Director of Local Government Audit

- Including traditional leaders in matters pertaining to local administration (Ugwu, 2000; Eme & Onyishi, 2014).

Additional Government Reforms

- Additional 149 councils were created in 1989 and new allocation formula gave 15 per cent to the councils. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1989).
- Primary Health care programme was transferred to the local council in 1990.
- Primary school administration followed in 1991. There was separation of power and appointment of political secretaries. Arowolo, 2008).
- Local Council Service Commission was abolished in 1992 and later reinstated. The revenue allocation formula was raised to 20 per cent. Later the councils were increased to 774, with administration and financial autonomy granted (Ugwu,2000).
- Gains in Council reforms appeared harmed by the 1999 Constitution, which introduced ambiguity and contradictions in the control and running of the local councils. For example, Section 7 (I) States: "The system of Local Government by democratically elected local councils is under this constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to Section 8 of this

constitution, ensure their existence under a law which provide for the establishment structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils”.

The National Assembly "shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local councils in the federation," according to Section 7(6a). Furthermore, Section 7(6b) adds to the uncertainty by saying that "House of Assembly of a State shall make provisions for statutory allocation of public revenue to local councils, within the state." Additionally, the National Assembly has the authority to enact laws pertaining to new councils prior to their legalization under Sections 8(5) and (6). Since the state government, state House of Assembly, and National Assembly all have a role in local council affairs, it is not surprising that governance at the grassroots levels has been characterized by confusion, intrigue, and non-performance; this is why reforms are necessary (Eme & Onyishi, 2014; Oviasuyi, Idada & Isiraojie, 2010).

Local Government Review of 2004

Alhaji Umaru Sanda Ndayako, the late Etsu-Nupe, presided over this evaluation before Alhaji Liman Ciroma took over. The National Council of States approved the study, and the Federal Government published a white paper on it (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The report contained the following:

- It kept the current 774 local government councils.
- All local government councils are required to submit their annual budgets to their state houses of assembly for approval;
- Make sure that local governments receive all money owed to them, including 10% of monthly revenue or any portion of federal funds sent to the states designated for local government; and ensure that local governments finance their various agencies and services, including paying primary school teachers and paramount traditional rulers.
- The State House of Assembly is solely responsible for managing local government and will enact the necessary laws.
- The planning and legal departments of the local government councils approved the creation of an inspectorate department to enforce adherence to the local government budget. Instead of using a State-Local Joint Account as was the previous arrangement, the National Assembly recently passed a new law in 2005 that allows Local Government Allocation to be paid directly to them. The percentage allotted by statute to municipal government was raised to 23%. The purpose of paying the local government the statutory allotment directly is to prevent the state governments from manipulating the joint account in their favor. The Conference of Assembly of Speakers has criticized this most recent clause,

viewing it as unlawful and fostering corruption in local government administration. Despite the Assembly of Speakers' criticism of this clause, the majority of Nigerians applauded the move because of the State Governments' deft manipulation of the State-Local Government Joint Accounts. Local Government Councils were thought to be able to carry out their main duties of grassroots development thanks to the reform. The reform's policy choice to offer training at all levels to all types of local government personnel was another significant breakthrough. Prior to that, unskilled employees, the majority of whom had only completed primary or secondary school, held posts in local government. Training programs for top local government officials were started by the reform in three locations: the Universities of Ife, Zaria, and Nsukka.

Nigeria's political and administrative structures underwent significant upheaval as a result of these reforms. In Nigeria, it is now the main level of grassroots democracy and the distribution of socioeconomic programs.

Local Government System

Local government systems are classified into three major groups, namely (Ekpe, 2006:72-75):

- i) The French local government system
- ii) The Anglo-Saxon local government system and
- iii) The communist local government system

The French System

Local governments in France are thought of as the local branch of the national government. Important powers and responsibilities are granted to local government councils under this system, which they carry out through the mayor, one of their major executives. However, a civil servant (the ideal), who speaks for the French government in the area, has the authority to lead, approve, or veto the processes of their deliberations (Ekpe, 2006; Arowolo, 2008). The system in France is one of the least representative. Its fundamental framework was established by Napoleon 1 in response to the necessity for revolutionary France to accelerate governmental reform while limiting the influence of local notables. It emphasizes distinct lines of jurisdiction that extend from the central government's minister of the interior through the department's centrally appointed prefect to the municipality, which has a municipal council and mayor elected locally. With broad authority to overrule local councils and oversee local spending, the prefect serves as both

the department's chief executive and the central bureaucracy's representative, providing the conduit of centralization (Arowolo, 2008; Ekpe, 2006). There are variants of this system in former French colonies and all around Europe. The three states of Nigeria (East Central, South Eastern, and Rivers States) purposefully modeled their local governments after the French system between 1971 and the beginning of 1979. This latter Midwestern state took a cue from the Eastern states. It was designed to reduce local government autonomy and address the issue of power abuse by local governments (Ugwu, 2000; Eme & Onyishi, 2014).

Anglo-Saxon System

The British system of local administration is the most typical of the main varieties and served as the template for the majority of the former colonies of that nation. The central government gives local governments authority, which is a defining feature of this paradigm. At the county and sub-county levels, these authorities were often used by elected councils. Compared to previous systems, this one had more local financial authority and less intervention from the national government. The main idea is that the central government decides how much autonomy the local government will have. Theoretically, local governments' authority can be limited by the federal government. The British system is unique in that it uses a large committee structure rather than a powerful

executive to oversee the management of public services (Ekpe, 2006; Arowolo, 2008; Agagu, 2004).

Marxian System

Looking at local government through a Marxist lens, one may wonder whether it isn't just a tool to further the bourgeoisie's interests and strengthen their grip on the masses and peasants (Ekpo, 2001). Local governments already exist in Marxist society, serving primarily the interests of their respective areas through a variety of activities. Therefore, there is no need to establish new ones. Take Russia as an example. There is a complex of government institutions whose primary function is to organize the economy, and local governments are just one element of it. A more complex and distinct function of the local government is assigned to it in communist China. The country is the center of attention in this type of municipal administration. Its population might be anywhere from a few hundred thousand to well over a million. As part of its public works management responsibilities, it oversees irrigation projects, fixes common consumer items, and maintains agricultural supplies and machinery. It is recommended that the nation work towards becoming economically self-sufficient and integrated internally. The municipal governments of France and Britain have been admired by many nations, but most have intricate systems (Ekpe, 2006; Eme & Onyishi, 2014).

Structures of Local Government

Administrative Structure of Executive Arm

Membership in the executive branch of a local government includes the chief executive officer, deputy chief executive officer, supervisors, secretary, and other senior officers. These days, a political climate permeates the role of local government secretary. Executive branch officials oversee the administrative unit, which consists of local government employees (career civil servants). The "Head of Personnel Management, Heads of department Of works, education, agriculture, health, finance and supplies" make up this group (Eneanya, 2012:35).

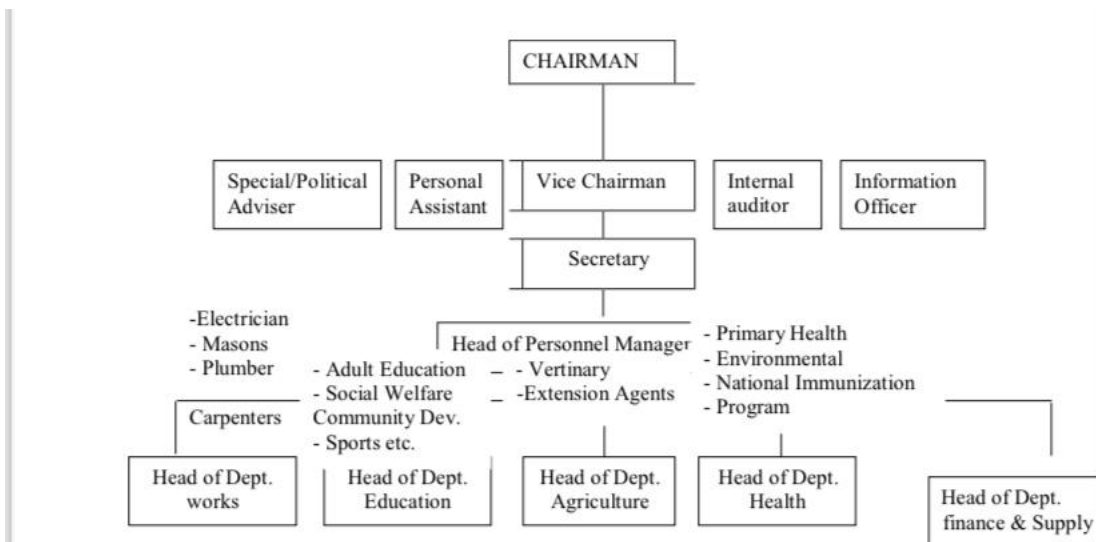


Fig.1 Administrative structure of the executive arm.

Each year, department heads are evaluated based on their actual accomplishments. The Secretary to the Local Government, in conjunction with the Chairman, shall assess each Department Head. The head of the appropriate municipal government will then assess the secretary.

Structure of the Legislature

Members of the local government who are elected to represent their wards make up the legislative branch. Legislative power rests with the Council, which includes the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Councilors. The authority to enact bylaws has been bestowed upon the Council. The Local Government Council Chairman's signature is required for these bylaws to take effect. Nonetheless, the Chairman may use his veto authority to refuse to provide his approval. The Chairman's refusal to consent to validly enacted bylaws by the Council might be overridden by a two-thirds majority of members.

Local Government Revenue

The capacity of any given local government to function is contingent upon the resources at its disposal. Sufficient funds are necessary to fulfill the numerous duties of municipal government. Local governments in Nigeria get their funding from both internal and foreign sources.

External Sources

- i. **Provisional Distribution from the Federal Government:** The Nigerian Constitution provides for the distribution of federation revenue among the federal, state, and local levels of government. A portion of the federal government's yearly earnings goes to state and regional governments as a result. Acts and decrees determine the rate of change for this percentage. It is currently little over 20% (Arowolo, 2008; Agagu, 2004).
- ii. **Federal and state grants** are resources allocated to local governments by those levels of government to aid in the completion of large-scale projects or the construction of necessary infrastructure. In certain cases, such as in the areas of education, agriculture, health, environmental protection, or disaster relief, local governments may also be eligible to receive special grants from the federal and state governments (Ekpe, 2006).
- iii. **VAT**—The portion of money collected from value-added taxes that the federal government of Nigeria distributes to the states and municipalities. As early as 1995, Nigeria implemented a VAT system (Eme & Onyishi, 2014).

Internal Source

Revenue can also be generated internally:

- (i) **Funding Development Projects**—The local government can get funding for development projects including water supply, rural electrification, road

building, and health facility provision through bank loans. On the other hand, the state government must give its consent for this (Arowolo, 2008).

- (ii) Rates—These are the fees received by the council from the various governmental entities for the services they offer. Market skills, motor parks, supermarkets, stores, and even bicycles, motorbikes, televisions, radios, and other electronic devices all contribute to the total (Ashiru, 1998). Additional taxes In this context, "levies" represent the levies that local governments use to bring in money for themselves. Profits from businesses and other commercial endeavors are a source of income for many municipal governments. Transportation services, farms, vacation spots, consulting firms, inns, etc. are all under the purview of some municipal administrations.
- (iii) Investment income — Local governments can increase its revenue stream through the purchase of shares, formation of partnerships with successful businesses, and the funding of economic initiatives that have the potential to provide substantial returns.
- (iv) Individuals do not pay a state income tax; instead, their local governments take a cut and send the rest to the federal government.
- (v) Fines from the Courts—Those who break the rules of cleanliness, the prohibition of hawking and street dealing, and other ordinances enacted by the local government are subject to fines from the courts (Arowolo, 2008). is subject to the property or tenement rate, which is levied on both commercial

and residential property owners. The building and property's worth will determine it.

- (vi) Contributions — Contributions from civic-minded persons in the local government facilitate the collection of funds for a specific community initiative.
- (vii) Other - Asset sales and the sale of confiscated goods (Ashiru, 1998:5). Building residential estates, floating micro-finance institutions, commerce, poultry, food processing, transportation, and other small-scale businesses are further untapped sources of income for local governments.

Challenges of Revenue Generation

Management of public funds implies both the acquisition and the disbursement of monetary resources. Improved income production and enhanced operational operations of local governments necessitate fresh approaches. Here we'll take a look at some of the options available to municipalities for bolstering their tax bases. The main issue with local administrations is corruption and bribery. The vast majority of tax dollars go straight into individual pockets. Tax collectors need to be closely supervised and given proper training. Other areas where municipal governments allow money to slip into private pockets include the finance and revenue department, the billing and tax records department, the property valuation and payroll departments, and so on. To keep up with modern accounting requirements and make inspections easier, these parts can be

automated (Ojofertimi, 1998:11). In particular, for tenement rates and motor parks, there has to be a system in place to limit the discretion of assessors. Revenue earned may be safely used for socio-economic development with efficient and fraud proof oversight machinery. The combined state-local government account should be dismantled because it has provided state governments in Nigeria with a means to steal money from their local counterparts, who have been severely underfunded. The situation may be salvaged if the federal decision to transfer funds directly to local governments were to be enforced.

Suggestions to Improve Revenue Generation

The local government's revenue base can be enhanced by implementing the following suggestions:

- (i) Eliminating the need for a "joint state-local government account" and allowing direct transfer from the federation account to local governments.
- (ii) Ensuring proficient oversight of tax collectors. In order to manage tax collections, some officials engage in dishonest practices such as using counterfeit receipts. Funds that are created usually end up in individual wallets. Such leakages will be controlled by close supervision and monitoring.
- (iii) With so many grassroots initiatives vying for funding, the federal and state governments should boost grant-in-aid to local governments.

(iv) For development projects, the local government should team together with the private sector. Corporations should be cognizant of their social duties in this area due to the fast pace of urbanization.

(v) Initiatives aimed at serving the public good, such as those that create jobs, facilitate trade and manufacturing, process food, etc., should be undertaken by local governments. The creation of jobs and the advancement of society and the economy would both be aided by such endeavors.

(vi) By instituting taxes and charges in certain of its services, local governments can generate more income, combat fraud, and effectively penalize tax evaders (Ugwu, 2003: 47).

(iv) Members of the council should have the power to choose their own chair and cabinet members. Members of the council would be compensated for their time and operate on a part-time basis, with the chairman and his cabinet working full-time. The expense of running a municipality would fall down if this happened. "Do or die" politics is caused by the astronomical salaries being earned by elected chairmen and councilors. Others who view grassroots politics as a "milk cow" will be pushed out by others with real interest in serving and means of subsistence within that system.

(v) There are several options available to local governments looking to increase their

revenue, including user fee and charge increases, local tax increases, new tax introductions, asset sales, and more.

(vi) To accomplish goals, the local government should implement improvement programs that make use of efficient means of reducing costs.

(vii) To effectively plan revenue sources and how to mobilize these resources, the local government's Planning, Research and Statistics unit should use a computer system to prepare a database on properties, buildings, the number of vehicles using motor parks, and market stalls.

(viii) Lastly, it is essential to keep accountability, transparency, and efficient record-keeping of all revenue. That is to say, if local governments are serious about maintaining fiscal accountability and integrity, they must automate their revenue and finance departments.

Problems of Local Government in Nigeria

Local government plays a crucial role in the growth of the nation. Excessive government control and intervention have been put forth as explanations for local government's ineffectiveness non growth.

The issues in managing local governments are as follows:
the lack of sufficient funds
Insufficient funding prevents the majority of local governments from meeting their legal obligations. Federally allotted monies are managed by most state governments through Joint-Account and money are misappropriated; domestically produced funds are insufficient grants. Consequently, local governments do not have nearly enough money to support social amenities and other community development initiatives. Local and state governments are able to maintain their financial independence under the Joint-Account system.

(ii) Bribery and dishonesty

The efficient functioning of local government administration is hampered by bribery and corruption involving officials of the local governments. Due to inadequate collection methods and the use of fraudulent receipts, a significant amount of money that ought to go to local governments ends up in private pockets.

(iii) Human resource shortage Local governments are severely understaffed in terms of qualified candidates. In order to serve the public effectively and efficiently, local governments rely on staff members who are qualified, experienced, and politically involved

(iv) Political Interference Even when state and federal policies and programs do not directly conflict with existing legislation, they are still needlessly obstructed by these

levels of government. Also, when members of political parties are in control at the local level, they tend to veto appointments that go against their party's ideology.

v) Ineffective Management There is a lack of senior leadership roles that could guide and coordinate the heads of the many departments. There has been an appropriate amount of capable leadership throughout the years.

There is favoritism, nepotism, and tribalism. These are a part of the process for transferring, disciplining, and promoting employees of municipal governments. Another issue is that people's dedication to their own ethnic, sectoral, and political interests has made it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

According to Eneanya (2009), in order for a lot of local government agencies to do their jobs well.

(vi) Deterioration of Power and Independence Over Time. Overly controlling state government activities has led to most state governments assuming responsibility for some local government functions. Local government activities were formed by the state governments. To facilitate the appointment, transfer, and termination of personnel, the state governments formed local government service commissions. In addition, each government has an office that serves as an advisor on issues pertaining to politics and local government. It is the authority of the State Houses

of Assembly to determine the creation, composition, structure, funding, and functions of such Local Governments. The 1999 Constitution establishes a system wherein the state houses of assembly are able to oversee the budgets of local governments (Chapter 6, Subsection 162, Subsections 6 and 8). This has rendered local governments useless since they are now seen as extensions of the state government (Ugwu, 2003:52).

(vii) Victimization and Partisan Politics Counselors elected by the party often consider themselves to be standing in for the party on the council. In addition, animosity and non-cooperation arise when members of the same political party hold the positions of chairman and councillor in local governments, which slows or halts the implementation of local government programs

(viii) Inequitable size of local governments

Some local governments are too big to efficiently manage their whole territory, while others are too little to collect enough tax money to launch worthwhile programs, all because the federal and state governments created them without discrimination.

ix) Unfair working conditions and low wages.

When it comes to attracting top talent, local governments' working conditions are typically pitiful.

➤ CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

An very recent shift in western thought has been the idea that personal freedom is an essential political and moral principle. Much of the modernist humanism from which

much of today's political and moral philosophy derives places moral emphasis on the capacity of a person to govern herself, apart from her position in a metaphysical order or her function in social and political institutions. Schneewind (1988), Swain (2016), and Rosich (2019) are relevant works for a historical examination of autonomy. Therefore, it carries the brunt of the debates that this legacy has sparked. Some people are skeptical of the assumption that governmental power and moral standards should be based on the self-governing person, rather than on a variety of factors related to location, culture, and social ties. Thus, autonomy is at the centre of the intricate (re)evaluation of modernity.

In its most basic definition, autonomy is the ability to control one's own behavior in accordance with one's own internal rather than externally imposed factors, including but not limited to one's own preferences, circumstances, and traits. This kind of autonomy seems to have indisputable worth, particularly when contrasted with its seeming antithesis, the extreme tyranny that results from being led by forces outside of one's self and which one cannot truly accept. The assertion that autonomy is an unqualified virtue for all persons is sure to provoke debate and doubt when the criteria of autonomy are defined more thoroughly.

There are several areas of political theory that rely on autonomy, including theories of individuals, ideas of moral duty and responsibility, the defense of social policy, and

many more. It is central to the Kantian understanding of practical reason and has connections to issues of moral responsibility; for examples, see Korsgaard (1996) and Hill (1989). This is also the facet of people that stops or should stop paternalistic interference in their life (Dworkin 1988, 121-29). Some argue that it lays out the fundamental purpose of liberal education (Gutmann 1987; Cuypers and Haji 2008; for more on this, see Brighouse 2000, 65–111). As a result, it is relevant to educational policy and philosophy. In addition, while many feminists have reservations about the concept of autonomy, it can be viewed as a useful conceptual element in certain feminist ideals, such as the pursuit of social conditions that oppress women and other marginalized individuals (Friedman 1997, Meyers 1987, Christman 1995). ("Veltman and Piper" in 2014).

➤ **Concept of Grassroot Democracy**

At the most basic level of government, grassroots democracies encourage public input and engagement. It plays a pivotal role in responsible leadership, long-term sustainability, and public participation. Residents have a say in local decision-making at the neighborhood, ward, or village level. Instead than relying on command and control from on high, it values bottom-up governance.

Advantages of Grassroot Democracy

Here are the advantages of grassroot democracy;

- Builds trust between people and government.
- Increases political awareness.
- Encourages leaders to be responsive because they are close to the people.
- Strengthens problem-solving tailored to local needs.

Challenges of Grassroot Democracy

These are;

- Low literacy and political education can limit participation.
- Elite capture where a few influential people dominate decisions.
- Corruption at the local level.
- Lack of funds or autonomy for local governments.
- Ethnic or political divisions affecting cooperation.

Ways to Strengthen Grassroot Democracy

- Grant full fiscal and administrative autonomy to local governments.
- Promote civic education at community level.
- Use digital platforms for participation.
- Strengthen anti-corruption mechanisms locally.
- Encourage community-based organizations to monitor governance.

Roles in Development

- Facilitates rural development by directly linking people to decision-making.
- Improves service delivery in health, education, and infrastructure.
- Enhances civic responsibility as citizens see the results of their involvement.

Grassroot Democracy in Nigeria

- Practiced mainly through the local government system.
- Constitutionally, Nigeria has 774 local government areas meant to serve as the grassroots tier.
- Challenges include poor funding, interference from state governments, and weak autonomy.
- Recent debates/research on local government autonomy aim to strengthen grassroots democracy.

➤ Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria

Nigeria tried out several forms of local government administration both before and after it gained independence. In Nigeria, the federal government dictates the where, when, and how of local government council operations, as pointed out by Ige (1996). It was a reflection of the heavy hand of the federal government on municipal affairs at that era. Even if the federal government is still involved, state governments now have more power over local governments, according to recent events. Legislation and the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) system govern the establishment,

financing, and administration of democratically elected local councils, as guaranteed by Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution. According to Vanguard (2024) and Punch (2024), governors often remove elected councils, form caretaker committees, and manage the distribution of funds. In every other nation, laws pertaining to local governments are enacted by the state or regional legislatures. Given the type of federation the Nigerian military established, we are not shocked by this development (for more information on this topic, see Nnoli (2011) and Elaigwu, 1979). During the colonial era, there was a great deal of administrative and financial independence for local governments. Local governments were modeled after the Whitehall system in Britain. It was the responsibility of each colonial territory to oversee the activities of the local government that were under its own jurisdiction. What this implies is that the legislative basis for local government is provided by each region: These laws were enacted in Northern Nigeria in 1954, the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance of 1950, and the Western Region Local Government Law of 1952. Otiye (1999) states that the councils were entrusted with several duties at this time, such as basic education, health, police, and the judiciary, among many others. The councils also had considerable discretion over personnel matters, finances, and overall administration. "The 1950s, therefore, was the era of pupilage for councils in modern local government throughout Nigeria," states one expert, who makes a valid point. What this means is that the federal government had little to no say in the day-to-day operations of the regional administrations, which in turn had control over the local

governments. Local governments in Nigeria are said to "run their own show" in popular culture. This means that they have a lot of autonomy over matters such as income generation and spending, lawmaking, policymaking, and the like. The rationale for this is not implausible. Both the preexisting native authority structure and that established by the British colonialists gave rise to the local administrations. The British employed these powerful structures to manage the nation. The regional governments that were established in 1946 were preceded by them. The British way of thinking about leadership had a significant impact on the prevailing political culture. It took educated Nigerians some time to weaken the regional councils' authority and functions, which helps to explain why they were so bitter about the native authority system and, by extension, the local government. Therefore, the type of municipal councils that existed in the 1950s were shaped by the specifics of the political climate of the period.

➤ **The Need for Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria**

Proponents of decentralization of power to municipalities highlight a variety of arguments in favor of this policy shift.

- The system will evolve with the support of local government autonomy, which will also aid in teaching rural residents about the political system.
- In addition to providing development, we must fortify democratic decentralization of power and empower individuals through grassroots government.

- Ensure that all Nigerians, regardless of whether they live in an urban, semi-rural, or rural location, benefit equally from development efforts; this would help those in rural areas enhance their capacity via creating jobs and paying them a living wage, which will empower them economically.
 - Reduce hazards to a level where employees can do their jobs effectively and the system can continue to operate. Workers in the federal government's local branches aren't collecting their paychecks on time, and they have to wait years after they retire to obtain their retirement benefits. This will provide the employees with a feeling of stability in their jobs, which will inspire them to give their all every day.
- Give minorities a say in local politics by electing them to local councils. Minorities, regardless of population size, will have a say in who serves as chairman or councilor of their local government. This will help citizens and their institutions demand more accountability, transparency, and development by giving them more agency. Because people have a hand in running the government, making decisions, and starting and tracking policies. All of these factors and more motivate the stakeholders and activists who are fighting for the belief in public engagement in government at all levels. The focus is moving from national to regional and municipal governments throughout the globe.

➤ **Relationship Between Local Government Autonomy and Grassroots Democracy**

There is a tight relationship between grassroots democracy and local government autonomy. With autonomy, local councils are free to make their own decisions and handle their own budgets without intervention from the federal or state governments. As a result of this autonomy, citizens are better able to have a say in the policies and initiatives that impact their neighborhoods. By shifting the focus from state and federal agencies to the people they represent, it improves political representation at the local level. Better responsiveness to local demands, better openness in resource allocation, and a venue for grassroots political education are all potential outcomes of autonomous local governments. When taken as a whole, these elements strengthen grassroots democracy by making government more accessible to the people and more in line with their goals.

➤ **Federal - State and Local Government Relations**

- When it comes to fiscal ties between governments, money is the most important policy issue. Mbanefo (1998) identifies the following as the most pressing unresolved issues regarding fiscal relations among the constitutional units of the Nigerian federation: the separation of tax powers and assigned functions; the allocation of revenues horizontally and vertically; the reliance of state and local governments on federal funding sources; and the trend toward federal concentration and presence in

the states. A new tax schedule had to be established for all levels of government since there were overlaps in tax and levy collection among the federal, state, and municipal governments, who are all empowered under the concurrent list on collection of taxes.

To handle intergovernmental interactions, however, the federal system frequently employs a plethora of administrative tools. Federal, state, municipal, and interstate constitutions in Nigeria have all been the subject of numerous conferences and meetings with administrative standing committees, constitutional boards, councils, and commissions (Eneanya, 2009: 255). These elements have been followed by the management of intergovernmental interactions since the birth of democratic administration in 1979 (Eneanya, 2009: 256 - 7).

- i. Making advantage of the National Council of States and the National Economic Council.
- ii. The importance of courts in settling conflicts between different levels of government, such as the case involving the disagreement between the federal and Lagos State governments over the establishment of a new local council and the supreme court's decision to invalidate the Revenue Allocation Act of 1981.
- iii) The position of the national assembly in settling the federal-state-local governments income sharing formula, the assembly of speakers, and the role of the state assemblies in their intergovernmental relations

- iii. How the management of intergovernmental relations is affected by the struggle between political parties. In order to settle disputes between governments, elected representatives from different parties increasingly work together.
- v. How people feel about politicians' acts at various levels of government, particularly when it comes to backing such politicians in disputes between different branches of government.

The overarching goal of all these gatherings was to better manage governmental ties with one another in an effort to reduce potential points of contention.

➤ **State – Local Government Relations**

Such relationships may show that federalism is functioning, but they also important in a federal system. The class would look at how different levels of government interact with one another in this subject. Under a federal system, interactions between state and municipal governments might not be a question of constitutionality. Local government entities have been considered a part of the state government prior to 1976. The creation and successful control of state governments is a function of their bylaws. Local government units were constitutionalized as a result of the 1976 countrywide reform, and the fourth schedule of 1979 substantially altered state-local government relations by enshrining the powers of local government.

This is noteworthy since the responsibility for overseeing elementary school curricula and healthcare services was delegated to the local government entities. Since the state and local governments stand to gain from the distribution of funds, these positions provide a platform for them to communicate with one another. The federal government of Nigeria now has a more official hand in state and local affairs because to this constitutional provision.

Inevitably, a state-local government joint account was established to divide up the funds allotted to local councils from the federal account, which formally established links between the two levels of government. The national assembly passed an executive measure that allowed the federal government to transfer funds directly to the local council units when it became clear that state governments were "short - changing" the local government units from the state - local government units' joint accounts. It was also accompanied by a provision that would levy a fee equal to the amount by which the council would be shortchanged if a state government were to undercut a local government on the monies allotted to it. It was to be expected that several state administrations voiced their disapproval and demanded its repeal. Despite the fact that these measures regarding the roles of local government units are positive political advancements, the issue of how to establish legally recognized links between states and municipalities has not been resolved. Regardless, it demonstrates that federalism is functioning.

➤ **Fiscal Relationship Between State and Local Governments**

The federal government and state and municipal governments also have financial ties. Before local governments can implement their yearly budgets, the state government must approve them. The state government actually specifies procedures for creating these kinds of yearly budgets. Approval was necessary for expenditures above specific thresholds. Furthermore, there is a limit to how much power municipal governments have. The budgetary and functional ties between the three levels of government are maintained by the third level. Here are some ways in which the state government interacts with municipalities:

- I. Distribute to the state's municipal governments 10% of its income that is earned internally.
- ii. If the proposed legislation does not violate the constitution or current federal laws, the state House of Assembly must pass it. The bill must address the structure's composition, revenue, spending, staffing meetings, and any other pertinent issues.
- iii. Form a joint planning Board by passing a bill in the state assembly; mandate that all governmental units take part in economic planning and development within their respective governmental areas.
- iv. Appoint a state auditor-general for local governments to oversee the routine

auditing of all local government accounts in the state in an effort to increase transparency and accountability at the municipal level;

v. As needed, provide state and municipal governments with advice, aid, and direction (but not control).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

➤ Decentralization Theory

The framework for comprehending Nigeria's local government autonomous dynamics is provided by decentralization theory. The practice of transferring power, resources, and duties from higher governmental levels to lower ones, such local governments, in order to improve efficiency, accountability, and public engagement is known as decentralization (Rondinelli, 1981). The main thesis is that deeper engagement with the public improves governance and decision-making.

Founder and Origin

James Rondinelli (1981) is intimately linked to decentralization theory, as he highlighted the need of administrative, political, and fiscal decentralization in fostering growth. By transferring authority from national authorities to subnational entities,

Rondinelli recognized decentralization as a means of enhancing governance and service delivery.

Assumptions and Themes

Decentralization theory is built on several assumptions:

- There is a clear correlation between the proximity of local governments to their constituents and their ability to meet their requirements.
- Local governments are better able to foster participatory governance and citizen involvement when they are given more authority and resources.
- By lowering bureaucratic bottlenecks at the federal level, decentralization increases efficiency.
- Innovation and individualized responses to social and economic issues are fostered by decentralization at the local level.

The key themes of decentralization include:

- Administrative decentralization, which entails giving more power to local units to handle administrative tasks.
- Giving decision-making authority to residents and elected local officials is an example of political decentralization.
- Decentralization of fiscal power, which means giving local governments more control over their own budgets and revenue streams.

Relevance to the Study

The effects of decentralized power in Nigeria's local governments are the focus of this research. Grassroots development, service delivery, and governance are all impacted by devolving authority and resources to local governments; decentralization theory offers

a framework for studying these effects. Examples of reforms that adhere to the concepts of political and fiscal decentralization include efforts to give authority over statutory allocations, budget approval, and staff management to local governments. The study can test the hypothesis that more effective governance and better socio-economic results have resulted from local government autonomy in Nigeria.

Strengths of Applying the Theory

- Provides a straightforward theoretical framework for examining the independence of local governments.
- Describes the connection between delegating authority, public engagement, and service provision.
- Gives policymakers something off on which to measure the success of local government reforms and interventions.

Weaknesses of Applying the Theory

- This may not always be the case because it presumes that local governments are capable and competent enough to handle resource management efficiently.
- Disregards the possibility of state-level political meddling that could reduce local authority.
- It might not take into consideration all of the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects that impact local government in Nigeria.

➤ Democratic Participatory Theory

All levels of government should actively incorporate individuals in governance and decision-making processes, according to the Democratic Participatory Theory. People should be actively involved in creating policies, allocating funds, and seeing them through under a participatory democracy, as opposed to a representative democracy, where elected officials make most of the decisions. Carole Pateman's (1970) contention that individuals' participation in decisions that impact their lives strengthens democratic legitimacy provides the theoretical basis for this approach. In Pateman's view, civic engagement served as a tool for community and individual empowerment in addition to being a fundamental political right.

Assumptions and Themes

The key assumptions of the theory include:

- The people have the knowledge and ability to make educated choices on their government.
- Public institutions are held more accountable, more transparent, and more responsive when citizens actively participate.
- Instead of receiving orders from on high, local governments should promote decision-making from the ground up. Good service delivery, community ownership, and social cohesiveness are all enhanced when people participate.
-

Deliberation, communal decision-making, citizen empowerment, and local autonomy are core themes. Democracy, according to the argument, works best when ordinary people have a say in matters that have an impact on their lives and the resources they have access to.

Relevance to the Study

Examining how local government autonomy has affected Nigeria calls for this perspective. When it comes to budgeting, service delivery, and revenue management, autonomy grants local governments the freedom to make their own judgments. The empowerment of local governments opens up more avenues for citizen participation in governance, such as town hall meetings, elections for local councils, and development project involvement. Local government autonomy in Nigeria is connected to grassroots growth, transparency, and accountability; this relationship can be better understood by applying the participatory democracy paradigm. Using the idea as a guide, we can see if the power delegated to municipalities actually leads to more active engagement from the general public.

Strengths of Applying the Theory

- Provides an obvious justification for investigating public participation in municipal administration.
- Stresses the connection between improved accountability and local government authority.
- Offers a standard by which to measure proposed changes to increase citizen engagement.

Weaknesses of Applying the Theory

- It presupposes that all residents are politically engaged and politically educated, which may not be the case in Nigeria owing to widespread political indifference or poor civic education.

- Might put too much stock in individual agency and not enough in systemic limitations like state government meddling or a lack of funding.
- The time and money needed to put participatory mechanisms into action can restrict their usefulness in real-world settings.

2.4 Empirical Review

Several researchers have spent a lot of time studying local government autonomy in Nigeria. They've looked at how it helps with grassroots democracy and what problems might arise when local governments aren't well-equipped to promote democracy and community development.

When Oviasuyi, Idada, and Isiraojie (2010) looked at the problems with local government autonomy in Nigeria, they discovered that when state governments meddle too much, local councils aren't able to do their jobs well. Their research showed that grassroots democracy fails when local governments are unable to manage their own resources.

The connection between decentralization of power and the quality of services provided was studied by Adebayo (2013). The study, which relied on survey data from chosen local governments, discovered that while autonomy increases grassroots involvement and accountability, local councils' effectiveness decreases when they rely too heavily on state appropriations for funding.

According to research by Ezeani (2012) on the topic of local government administration in Nigeria, genuine autonomy boosts community development and

democratic engagement. The study did find that council corruption and ineffective leadership continue to be obstacles to democratic practice.

Local government is the most accessible level to the people, according to Agagu (2004), but political intervention and constitutional uncertainty have limited its capacity to foster democracy. It appears from the data that grassroots involvement is still low in the absence of true autonomy.

Ogbomwan (2018) investigated the administration of local governments in Edo State and came to the conclusion that councils are unable to effectively promote democracy due to political meddling and inadequate institutional frameworks. Rural development was the main topic of a case study conducted by Dance, Ibrahim, and Dalyop in 2024 in Kaduna State. They came to the conclusion that caretaker committees and the State-Joint Local Government Account arrangement stunt development in rural areas. They argue that local councils should be allowed to function autonomously, without interference from the state, and that these should be abolished. Local councils were awarded direct financial and administrative power in a 2024 case sponsored by Nigeria's Supreme Court. While Adogbeji and Onwunyi applaud this move toward grassroots democracy, they caution that enforcement is still lacking in practice.

Oti and Otalor examined budgetary autonomy and transparency throughout Nigeria in 2024. Councils were discovered to have opaque finance procedures. Many of them do not maintain operational websites or make available financial data. The report calls on the federal and state governments to take action after it relates more financial

independence to improved governance results. Research shows that the majority of academics think that local government autonomy is important for grassroots democracy to work, but that obstacles like corruption, state meddling, and inadequate institutions keep it from succeeding. This research adds to what is already known by presenting new empirical findings from Nigeria.

2.5 Summary of Literature Review

The review was done under the following:

1. Theoretical framework
2. Conceptual framework
3. Review of empirical studies

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CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this section, the methods and processes that were employed to gather and analyze the data are detailed and explained.

3.2 Research Design

A survey research design was used in this study. The researcher can quickly and cheaply collect data from a broad population using the survey approach, making it an acceptable choice. Studies that aim to characterize respondents' ideas, attitudes, and perceptions of a social or political issue are well-suited to surveys, according to Creswell (2014). The researcher intends to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the effects of local government autonomy on grassroots democracy in Nigeria, which is why this design was selected.

3.3 Population of the Study

Nigerians who take part in governance and democratic processes, including electorate, government servants, traditional leaders, political office holders, and members of civil society, made up the population of this study. Participants had to be at least 18 years old to legally participate in democratic activities like voting and holding public office, so that's who the researchers targeted in the study.

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study is 150 people. We will select our sample by combining simple random sampling with a more deliberate selection process.

- Respondents with first-hand knowledge or experience with municipal administration, including public officials, community leaders, and government employees, will be chosen through a purposive sample process.
- In order to provide a fair representation of opinions, regular persons will be selected by simple random sampling.

3.5 Method of Data Collection

The study will make use of both primary and secondary data.

- **Primary Data:** The primary data for this study consist of raw data generated from responses to questionnaires and interviews by the respondents.
- **Secondary Data:** The secondary data include information obtained through the review of literature that is textbooks, journal articles, government publications,

newspapers, and online resources that are relevant to local government autonomy and grassroots democracy in Nigeria.

3.6 Research Instrument

The major instrument for data collection is the questionnaire. The questionnaire will be designed using simple and clear language, divided into two sections:

- Section A: Demographic information of respondents.
- Section B: Questions related to local government autonomy and grassroots democracy.

For the most part, we'll be using a 4-point Likert scale (Very Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) to gauge how people feel.

3.7 Validity of Instrument

The research tool used in this study was face-validated. Validation via face examination ensures that the survey questions are suitable. This is because, at first glance, face validation can tell you whether a measuring device really measures what it claims to. Therefore, the purpose of face validation is to find out how well the questionnaire fits in with the study's purposes. Before the instrument is put through face validation, the supervisor will validate copies of the first questionnaire draft. The supervisor is expected to provide a critical evaluation of the instrument items in relation to the study's objectives and offer practical ideas for improving the instrument's

quality. The instrument will be fine-tuned according to his suggestions before being used in the study.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

To ensure that the results are presented in a straightforward and accessible manner, the data will be analyzed using simple percentages and frequency tables. The interpretation of the results will shed light on the connection between grassroots democracy in Nigeria and the autonomy of local governments.

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CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

Data gathered from surveys sent out to people all over Nigeria is presented and analyzed in this chapter. We sent out 150 surveys, and 136 of them were filled out and sent back accurately. We can confidently draw conclusions from this data because the response rate was 90.7%. In order to portray the opinions of respondents regarding the effect of local government autonomy on grassroots democracy in Nigeria, the gathered data were examined using frequency tables and basic percentages.

4.2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	78	57.4
Female	58	42.6
Total	136	100

Males made up 57.4% of the sample and females 42.6%, as seen in the table. There was an equal number of men and women who took part in the survey, proving that the gender ratio was balanced.

Table 4.2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18 - 25	32	23.5
26 - 35	48	35.3
36 - 45	30	22.1
46 and above	26	19.1
Total	136	100

The majority of responders (35.3%) fell between the 26–35 age bracket, according to the table. The opinions of people in this age bracket are particularly relevant to the study because of their involvement in government and civic engagement.

Table 4.3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SSCE	20	14.7
ND/NCE	34	25.0
B.Sc/HND	58	42.6
Postgraduate	24	17.7
Total	136	100

The majority of respondents (42.6%) had a bachelor's degree or more, suggesting that this is a highly educated community that can articulate thoughtful views on issues of federalism, statehood, and local autonomy.

4.3 Presentation of Responses to Research Questions

Table 4.4: Respondents' Opinion on Whether Local Government Autonomy Enhances Grassroots Democracy

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	70	51.5
Agree	42	30.9
Disagree	14	10.3
Strongly disagree	10	7.3
Total	136	100

An overwhelming majority of respondents (82.4%) believe that decentralization strengthens democracy at the grassroots level. It appears that when financial and administrative activities are left to the local level, involvement and responsibility are both strengthened.

Table 4.5: How Many Think State Involvement Decreases the Effectiveness of Local Government

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	76	55.9
Agree	38	27.9
Disagree	12	8.8
Strongly disagree	10	7.4
Total	136	100

Local governments' independence is threatened by state meddling, according to the majority of respondents (83.8%). Due to their reliance on state governments for both funding and decision-making, local councils frequently face this problem, which hinders the effectiveness of grassroots democracy.

Table 4.6: How Many People Think Their Local Government Encourages Citizens to Get Involved in Decision-Making

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	60	44.1

Agree	48	35.3
Disagree	16	11.8
Strongly disagree	12	8.8
Total	136	100

Roughly three-quarters of people who took the survey think that local governments actively seek out and welcome citizen input into policymaking. This demonstrates that, in an ideal world, local councils would act as the primary conduit for citizen-government dialogue.

Poll Takers' Opinions on the Impact of Local Governments' Financial Dependence on Performance (Table 4.7)

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	72	52.9
Agree	40	29.4
Disagree	14	10.3
Strongly disagree	10	7.4
Total	136	100

Without sufficient funding, local governments are unable to do their jobs effectively, according to the majority of respondents (82.3%). If local governments want to foster grassroots democracy, they need to be able to access their cash directly.

Table 4.8: Opinions on the Potential Improvement of Service Delivery by Local Government Autonomy

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	68	50.0
Agree	44	32.4
Disagree	14	10.3
Strongly disagree	10	7.3
Total	136	100

A whopping 82.4% of people who took the survey think that complete independence can improve service quality. This supports the idea that when not micromanaged by the state, local governments may better meet the needs of their constituents.

4.4 Summary of Findings

1. Most respondents agree that local government autonomy strengthens grassroots democracy.
2. State interference in local government affairs remains a major challenge.
3. Financial dependence limits local government effectiveness.

4. Autonomy encourages citizen participation and improves service delivery.
5. There is a strong belief that constitutional reforms are necessary to guarantee genuine local government independence in Nigeria.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

According to the results, self-determination is key for grassroots democracies to thrive. A majority of respondents agreed that local governments are better able to meet the demands of their constituents and hold themselves accountable when they have decision- and money-making authority. Furthermore, the study verifies that local councils' ability to work effectively has been diminished due to state meddling, specifically the joint allocation system.

These findings corroborate those of Arowolo (2011) and Olowu and Wunsch (2004), who also discovered that centralization undermines African local administration. Effective decentralization, according to Adeyemi (2013), encourages public participation and openness. Hence, empowering Nigerian municipalities to make all policy decisions on their own will increase civic engagement and boost development results at the grassroots level.

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CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This research looked at how decentralization of Nigeria's local governments affected citizen participation in democratic processes. The study's overarching goal was to learn how local autonomy influences accountability, engagement, and service provision. Of the 150 surveys sent out, 136 were filled out accurately and used for data analysis.

The results showed that the majority of people think autonomy makes grassroots democracy better. The key challenges to efficient local government were deemed to be financial dependency and state involvement. Independent local governments, according to respondents, boost community development, increase openness, and encourage citizen participation.

In order to consolidate democracy and achieve sustainable development in Nigeria, the study found that local government autonomy is important.

5.2 Conclusion

For grassroots democracy to flourish, local governments must have the freedom to make their own decisions. Independent local councils are better able to address community concerns. But administrative meddling and governmental control via the joint allocation system keep the system from reaching its full potential.

Encouraging local governments to operate independently of excessive external interference is crucial to the advancement of democracy in Nigeria. Accountability, involvement, and balanced national growth can all be enhanced with complete autonomy.

5.3 Policy Recommendations

The study's conclusions suggest the following legislative changes to improve grassroots democracy and local government autonomy in Nigeria:

1. **Ensure Full Autonomy for Local Governments:** Local councils should be granted constitutional and financial autonomy by the federal and state governments. Because of this, they will be able to take charge of their own destiny and decide how to best meet the needs of their communities.

2. **Eliminate the Joint Accounts System:** Local government accounts should be refunded directly rather than through the current joint account system between the state and local governments. Because of this, wasteful bureaucratic meddling will decrease and productive use of resources will increase.
3. **Enhance Transparency and Accountability:** It is imperative that local governments implement strong systems for budgeting, reporting, and monitoring. Public trust and participation can be enhanced by open and honest financial dealings.
4. **Invest in Capacity Building:** Local government officials should be provided with regular opportunities for training and professional growth. Increasing one's proficiency in administrative and managerial tasks will lead to better service and more efficient operations.
5. **Promote Community Participation:** Town hall meetings, public forums, and participatory planning are all great ways for citizens to become involved with their local government. The needs and priorities of the community will be reflected in the policy.

6. Constitutional Safeguards for Local Governments: In order to safeguard the autonomy of local governments within the federal system and prevent their political manipulation, it is necessary to examine the constitution.

Adopting these policies will make Nigeria's local government system more robust, independent, and responsible. Improving service delivery, strengthening grassroots democracy, and making a significant contribution to national growth are all outcomes of these reforms.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Political Science
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Benin,
Benin City

The Impact of Local Government Autonomy on Grassroots Democracy in Nigeria

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect information for an academic research project on local government autonomy and grassroots democracy in Nigeria. The responses will be treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes. Kindly respond honestly to each question.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Haruna Abdullahi

Researcher:

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please tick (✓) the option that applies to you.

1. Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

2. Age:

☐ 18–25 years

☐ 26–35 years

☐ 36–45 years

☐ 46 years and above

3. Educational Qualification:

☐ SSCE

☐ ND/NCE

☐ B.Sc/HND

☐ Postgraduate

4. Occupation:

☐ Student

☐ Civil Servant

☐ Private Sector Employee

☐ Self-employed

☐ Others (specify) _____

SECTION B: IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTONOMY

Tick (✓) the option that best represents your opinion.

Key:

SA = Strongly Agree

A = Agree

D = Disagree

SD = Strongly Disagree

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD
1	Local government autonomy enhances grassroots democracy in Nigeria.				
2	State interference affects the independence of local government councils.				
3	Local governments promote citizen participation in governance.				
4	Financial dependence on state governments limits local government performance.				
5	Full autonomy will help local governments deliver better services to the people.				
6	Local governments are more accountable when they have control over their funds.				
7	State governments should not control local government funds through joint accounts.				
8	Lack of autonomy contributes to corruption and inefficiency in local government.				
9	Local government autonomy encourages development at the community level.				
10	The constitution should be amended to guarantee full local government autonomy.				

SECTION C: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Please answer briefly.

1. In your opinion, what are the major challenges facing local government autonomy in Nigeria?

2. How can local government autonomy be improved to promote grassroots democracy?

3. Do you think full autonomy will reduce corruption and increase accountability at the local level? Why or why not?

Thank You

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