



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH EAST STATES OF NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

<sup>1</sup>SECUNDA CHIZOBAM ONWUHARAONYE <sup>2</sup>EBIZIEM, JUDE EBIZIEM  
<sup>3</sup>NNANYERE, NWACHUKWU EBERE

<sup>1</sup>Department of History and International Studies Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri  
<sup>2</sup>Department of Political Science Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. <sup>3</sup>Department of  
Public Administration, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri

#### ABSTRACT

This study examines Strengthen Democracy and Leadership in the development of Local Government in South East of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. There has been a growing concern over the deplorable conditions of the rural people in South East. Unarguably, the expediency for the creation of local government as the third tier government is to facilitate Development at the grassroots. However, it is worrisome that the deterioration and overall decline in the quality of service delivery in the local government particularly in South East as a result of unbridled and unpatriotic leadership style adopted by the state governors towards local government administration has unimaginably brought dysfunctional and deficit infrastructure to the Local Government System. The objective of this study is to explore the Nexus between Strengthen Democracy and leadership in the Development of local government system in South East Nigeria. The study reviewed extant literature conceptually, theoretically and empirically with the democratic participatory prepositions for its theoretical framework. Methodologically, the study being a non-structured, non-experimental, non-survey, adopted qualitative documentary secondary sources of historical description and explanatory approach for its secondary Data collection. Content analytical technique was utilized for its analysis. Based on the analysis, findings show that abysmal and unpatriotic leadership coupled with the lacuna in the constitution has necessitated the State Governors embarking on unilateral, arbitrary, unlawful joint account and dissolution of democratically elected Government leaders which negatively undermined the affairs of local government administration, and it has given limited, hindered access to the funding of local government for development programmes. Therefore, the study recommends among others, that with the current supreme court judgment on Local Government, patriotic leadership, constitutional amendment and devolution of powers will prevent state Government arbitrarily interference and diversion of local Government funds and full political participation of the citizenry in the third tier government should be sustained.

**Keywords:** Strengthen Democracy and Leadership, Development, Constitutional Amendment, South East, Supreme Court Judgment on Local Government

#### *Corresponding Author*

Secunda Chizobam ONWUHARAONYE,

Email Address [secunda.onwuharaonye@alvanikoku.edu.ng](mailto:secunda.onwuharaonye@alvanikoku.edu.ng).

**Received:** 15/12/2024; **Revised:** 18/2/2025; **Accepted:** 24/2/2025; **Published:** 28/2/2025



## 1.0. INTRODUCTION

Local government is a level of government with assigned legislative and executive powers to execute and make policies covering a particular area made up of communities (localities) of the local government. The constitution provides for its establishment, defines its structure, functions, powers and sources of revenue for its activities. Furthermore, its relationship with the state and federal governments is clearly stated in the constitution (Philip, 2009). However, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria introduced some ambiguous clauses in the relationship between the local and state governments and prominent among them is the state-local government joint account (SLGJA) arrangement which has seriously eroded the financial autonomy of the local government system in Nigeria. The SLGJA has been so much misinterpreted by the state government that the local government council whether elected or by appointment is heavily under the overbearing influence of the state government always (Ananti, 2016). Local government was designed to assume the position of a third tier of government envisioned as self-governing entities with elected officials, local Government handled critical aspects of Community life, primary education, health, local infrastructure and community security was a dream of grassroots democracy closer to the people where decision were made. (Ebiziem, 2021).

Ebiziem, (2021), further posited that other specific reasons for the creation of local government include but not limited to: making appropriate services and development activities responsive to local wishes and initiatives by devolving or delegating them to local representative bodies, others are sensitizing and mobilizing the various communities in their areas of authority in order to get involved in the overall development of those areas. It is highly doubtful if local governments in South East Nigeria have been able to effectively meet these laudable goals and others since their creation.

The democratic participatory school holds that local government functions to bring about democracy and to afford the citizenry opportunities for political participation as well as to educate and socialize them politically. The efficient service delivery school of thought, on the other hand, stresses that what is important and central to the local government is not the bringing about of democracy but rather its ability and capability to provide efficient and effective basic services to the people at the grassroots. The developmental school of thought lays emphasis on how local government in a developing country can be an effective agent of a better life, an improved means of living socially and economically, and as a means to better share of the national wealth. The recurring abuse of the provisions concerning local government in the 1979, 1989 and 1999 Constitutions, especially by the state government, refreshed agitations for local government autonomy. As a result, scholars including Okoli (1980); Nwabueze (1982); Adeyemo (2010); Lamidi & Fagbohun (2013); Onuigbo (2015); Ugwu (2017), and Ebiziem (2021) have not wavered in their advocacy for direct financial allocation to local government, in order to protect its autonomy.



Local governments symbolize catalyst of socio-economic and political development in every country of the world. They provide the foundation upon which other structures of governance (state and federal) are created. Local governments are closet than other levels of government to the vast majority of people who inhabit the rural areas. They are thus, in a better position than the state and federal governments to appreciate the real problems of the people and serve as the most effective agents for mobilizing the people for collective energy and resources towards engineering positive social, economic and political development of the country. It is the realization of the importance of local government as a catalyst of development and engine of progress that the paper advocates the autonomy of this tier of government in the conduct of their internal affairs in order to enhance the performance of their traditional role as vehicles of socio economic and political development at the grassroots. (Ebiziem 2021, Ezeani 2006). The history of South East local government system has been characterized by yearnings for democratization and autonomy to enable the local governments assume their socio-economic and political functions of transforming their local communities. This thinking accelerated the demands for the right to participate in local politics. Before the adoption of a uniform local government system in Nigeria, following the 1976 Local Government Reforms, issues and problems of local governments were entirely left to the whims and caprices of the regional and later states governments. The regional or states governments, without exception, modified and manipulated local government systems and institutions as they considered expedient. These situations whittle down the power and autonomy of the local government authorities.

More worrisome, the 774 local government councils in the country including South East states are presently in dire financials strait and unable to cater to people at the lowest level in accordance with their constitutional mandate due to the actions and inactions of state governors who undermine the 1999 constitution by embarking on unilateral, arbitrary, unlawful joint account and dissolution of democratically elected local Government leaders. Following the poor state of affairs in the local government councils across the country, the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees accused state governors of crippling the third tier of government.

Equally, the Nigeria Financial intelligence unit (NFIU), NASS and the Federal Government (FG) took 36 Governors to supreme court seeks full autonomy of LGA. (See suit No SC/CV/343/2024). PUNCH Investigation revealed that apart from the structures and premises of most local government council headquarters being currently in a dilapidated state, funding of the councils had become difficult due to the continued tampering with the money belonging to them by state governors. NULGE also raised the alarm that 34 out of the 36 state governors including South East states were guilty of diverting local government funds, leaving the government closest to the people with inadequate funds to develop the communities. <https://www.ourheritagereporters.com.ng> NASS (2024).



Out of the 36 states, NULGE said only Rivers and Jigawa were clean of the allegation, while the remaining state governors had refused to steer clear of local government council funds despite a directive by the Nigeria Financial Intelligence Unit for them to desist from the act. In South East, it has been observed that many of the States have refused to democratically conduct their election. Thus we have the following: in **Abia State**: Last Local Government election was held in 2015 while in **Imo State**: Last local government election was held in 2018, but it was later annulled by the state government. Also, in **Enugu State**: Last Local Government election was held in 2015. Equally, in **Ebonyi State**: Last local government election was held in 2015. Although it was observed that election recently took place after the Supreme Court judgment. In addition, in **Anambra State**: Election was held last in 2014. They relegate the indigenes/members of the rural area to the background because they do not participate in the democratic activities of the States.

The constitution of Nigeria recognizes Federal States and Local Government as three tiers of governments and that deliberate act by the state governors as they denied the grassroots of the effective leadership the masses desired, adding that the diversion of resources meant for development in the grassroots would continue to be undermined. Against this background, this paper examines strengthen democracy and leadership in relation to development in the South East local government thus, for easy comprehension, it is divided into introduction, conceptual clarification, theoretical framework, methodology, Nexus of Democracy and Development, Conclusion and Recommendation.

## **2.1. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **Local Government**

The term local government means different things to those who at various times have attempted to explain what the term really stands for. Adrain (1972) writing in the International Encyclopedia of the Social sciences, defines local government as.

*A political sub decision of a national or regional government which performs functions that are culturally defined as local in character which in nearly all cases receive its legal powers from the national government but possess some degree of discretion in the making of decisions, and which normally has some taxing powers. (Adrain, 1972:7).*

Similarly, Wraith (1972), Emezi (1986) in Awa (1987) and Ebiziem (2021), states that the term local government refers to a political authority set up by a nation or state as a subordinate authority for the purpose of dispersing or decentralizing political power. A fairly comprehensive and more up to date definition was that given by the federal government blueprint or reform guidelines that preceded the 1976 local government reforms which saw it as;



*Government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise powers. Within defined areas, has substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to ensure that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (Fed. Govt. Blue print;1976:1).*

From the above definitions, we can deduce that local government is political and administrative machinery for governing or for the provision of governmental services at the sub-national level. Generally, local government means the breakdown of a country or state into small units or localities for the purpose of administration in which the inhabitants of the deferent units or localities concerned play direct and full part through their elected representatives who exercise power or undertake transactions under the general authority of the national or central government.

In addition to foregoing, local government is the system of political decentralization within a country in which the power base of the decision maker is to a large extent, not national but local. The word decentralization as used here implies organizational arrangement whereby the management of public function is transferred to sub-national bodies or agencies with jurisdictions limited to only certain parts of a nation's territory. Decentralization can be classified into two; decentralization through deconcentration and decentralization through devolutions. Decentralization through deconcentration is transfer of administrative functions from central ministries to field agencies, it is the delegation of executive and non-decisional responsibilities to sub - administrative structures, which are, in fact, part of the central government structure. Deconcentration can, thus, be regarded as a limited form of decentralization. Government bodies created under this pattern are regarded as having no substantive decision-making or allotted powers, such powers are retained by the headquarters, and they only have control over matters of implementation. Under these types of decentralization, the staffs operating at the local level are central government personnel who can also be transferred back to the central level.

Decentralization through devolution involves the transfer of functional responsibility, including decision making authority to legally constituted sub-national units of government such as states in a federal system and districts or municipal authorities. In such arrangements under devolution, central and sub-national governments are supposed to be structurally differentiated; each level has its own legally defined powers and activities, as well as separate institutional bodies for personnel recruitment. Under this kind of decentralization, districts or municipal authorities like local government councils formulate and implement policies. On the other hand, Ikelegbe (2005) defines local government as "a segment of a constituent state or origin of a nation state", established by law to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its jurisdiction. Fajobi (2010) defines local government "as a unit of





government to maintain law and order based on range of social amenities and to encourage cooperation and participation of people at the grassroots to improve their living conditions". United Nations Development Programme (2009) define local government as a unit of government covering the range of government issues that exist at the local level including decentralization of policies and processes, the role and inter-relationships of deferent actors and institutions, local democracy and local government performance.

For the purpose of this paper, different issues raised from the definitions above are to form a broad conceptualization of local government as follows:

- The Local Government is a political authority with elected officials which has political powers to take decision.
- The Local Government is a subdivision of the central Government established by the law.
- The Local Government is a unit of Government closet to the people to provide basic social and economic activities.
- The Local Government is an entity that has substantial autonomy to make laws, rules and regulations. Also the autonomy to formulate and execute programmes and policies.
- The Local government is expected to facilitate the existence of democratic self government close to the local government levels of the society, and to encourage initiative for leadership potentials.
- The local government is expected to mobilize human and materials resources through the involvement of members of the public.
- The local government is expected to provide a two way channel of communication between the Local government and central government

From the above issued related, we can therefore adopt the broad functions of the local government and the rationale behind the existence of local government

### **Democracy**

Democracy, according to the Greeks, means the rule of the people. Democracy is both a philosophy and a form of government. As a philosophy, it is an ideology of human society and a way of political life, "a set of ideas and methods motivating and guiding the behavior of members of a society towards one another not only in their political affairs but also in their economic, social and cultural relationships as well" (Rodee et al, 1957:83). As Merriam (1939:44) puts it, democracy is "not a set of formula or blue print of an organization, but a cast of thought and a mode of action directed by the common will".

As a form of government, democracy is defined by Bryce (1921) as "a government in which the will of the majority of qualified citizens rules, taking the qualified citizens to constitute at



least  $\frac{3}{4}$  so that the physical force of the citizens coincides with their with their voting power”. In his book, the **Nature of Democracy**, Holden (1974:8) defines democracy as “a political system of which it can be said that the whole people, positively or negatively make or are entitled to making or determining decisions on important matters of public policy”. In his own view, Appadorai (1968:137) conceives democracy in simple way thus “system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives periodically elected by themselves”. Put simply, an American President, Abraham Lincoln, defined democracy as “government of the people, by the people and for the people. What is implicit in these definitions is popular sovereignty. (Ebiziem 2010).

Democracy can, therefore, be defined as a system of government in which the people possess the power to make final decisions on major issues of public policy, and in which the end of government is the realization of the common good for all citizens, the development of independent human personality, the creation of equal opportunities for all citizens, and the full realization of active participation of the great majority of the citizen in the process of government. Similarly, Democracy operates under the following principles, namely: Self-government/popular participation, Public Accountability, Human Rights, Equality, Legitimacy, Independence of the judiciary, Freedom of the Press, Public welfare, Periodic election and Constitutionalism.

However, Local Government election is a critical part of the democratic process, which ensures representation and decision-making at the community level. It provides citizens with a voice in Local Governance and contributes to the overall functioning of the Nation’s Political system.

### **Leadership**

Leadership is the exercise of power or influence in social collectives such as groups, organizations, communities or nation. Olugbade as cited in Ebiziem et al (2021) sees leadership as both a research area and a practical skill encompassing the ability of an individual or organization to “lead” or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organization. Leadership can either be understood as a pattern of behavior or a personal quality. As a pattern of behavior, leadership is the influence exerted by an individual or group over a large body to organize or direct its efforts towards the achievement of desired goals. As a personal attitude, leadership refers to the character traits which enable the leader to exert influence over others. Leadership is thus equated with charisma which is the personal charm or power to lead.

He says democratic political leaders therefore have to be mindful of the side effects of their leadership style on the people they lead least the undesirable effects derail democratic process. Bad leadership lead to undesirable outcome like it concretes power and can thus lead to corruption and tyranny, hence the democratic demand that leadership should be checked by accountability, it creates a situation of subservience and difference which may discourage



people from participating in issues that concern them and thus lead to failure to take responsibility for their own destiny. Schmidt (1933:283) says, the relation of leadership arises only where a group follows an individual from free choice and not under command or coercion and secondly, not in response to blind arises but on positive and more or less national grounds. The concept of leadership should be understood as encompassing a wide range of activities. It applies to the running of social groups and the governing of nations, it may concern the relatively diffuse process of influence in establishing norms of style or opinions; or it may involve specific orders in a chain of command. It includes supervision and statesmanship, routine administration and organization building. Writing on the continue existence of under-development, such as poor and inadequate infrastructure, inefficient and ineffective service delivery, corruption, high level poverty and misery, Achebe (1983:1) Assert that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. In other words, good leadership is a prerequisite in the development of Local Government in South East Area of Nigeria.

### **Development**

The concept development has been subjected to many controversial explanations and definitions purportedly because of its multi-dimensional facet. Development appears to be one of the terminologies that touch almost every aspect of human existence either positively or negatively. However, our approach here touches on the positive aspect of development as a way of improving the standard of living of the masses. The concept of development encompasses economic, political, socio-cultural and environmental development. When a state is working assiduously to achieve these spheres of development, the citizens will no doubt be on a fast

match on enjoying improved standard of living and longevity. “Development is not what the economist and other experts proclaim it to be, no matter how elegant their language. Development is not something to be decided by experts, simply because there are no experts on the desirable goals of human life. Development is the desirable course to be taken by human beings in a particular situation” (Berger, 1976.p.59). Accordingly, it means that what constitutes the concept of development is usually determined by the affected human beings in a particular situation believed to be geared towards the resolution of the current circumstance. Similarly, Okereke (2003,p.1) averred that development is conceptualized as the qualitative improvement in the standard of living of the majority of the people through the provision of economic and social infrastructures like industries, employment, water, electricity, health facilities, good roads etc.

Sen (2008) defined development as collective activities by any human society directed at reducing the totality of perceived obstacles to a higher standard of living; thus maximizing the quality of lives of its citizens. Development can also be seen as gradual advance or growth through progressive changes. It is a gradual differentiation of an ecological community; the term is also used to described the process of economic and social





transformation within the countries. While Seers, in his conception, related development to eradication of poverty, unemployment and in equality in a society among other variables when he asserted that: The questions to ask about country's development are therefore; what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to inequality?

if all the three of these have declined from high levels than beyond doubt this has a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if the entire have, it would be strange to call the result "Development" even if per capita income doubled (Seer, 1969:3). For Seers, understanding how a country is firing in these three indices can help us answer the question of how developed a country is. Seers (1969) questions are still crucially relevant today in development discuss and in understanding how emerging democratic states like Nigeria are tackling the socio-economic and political challenges they face. Scholars such as Rodney (1972), Nnoli (1981), Ake (2001) and Ebiziem (2021), have argued that development is multifaceted and indeed centered on man. For them, man is the beginning and end of development, as other manifestations of development are artifacts of development and leads to total repudiation of the state of being.

For Nnoli (1981) development could be seen as a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and the society interact with their physical, biological and inter human environments transforming them for own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process. Okolie (2009) corroborates this view by positing that development leads to total transmogrification of man. For him, development improves man's potentials and capacities and subsequently eliminates and/or reduces poverty, penury, condition for human existence and self-reproduction. Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) conceptualized development as the process of empowering people to maximize their potentials and the ability to exploit nature to meet daily human needs. It can also be seen as a process by which quality of human lives and capacity to surmount daily needs are considerably improved. In a similar vein, Goulet (1971, p.2), indicated that "life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom of choice are the three core values of development for individual and societies". Development should be conceived as a state of human wellbeing rather than as the state of national economy. It is defined as the increase in the value of goods and services produced by every sector of the economy.

In another academic presentation, Igboeche (2017 p.297) cited (Todaro and Smith, 2003 p.17), observed that development should be conceived as a multi: -dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty. They further stated that "development in its essence, must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of



life widely perceived as unsatisfactory towards a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better”

Development is therefore defined as the encompassing efforts made by both constituted authority and the citizens to achieve a prosperous nation whose citizens enjoy sustainable high standard of living, security and environmental protection. Thus, in connection to the study, development will mean collective effort by the Imo State Government and controlling ministries to ensure that requisite tangible and intangible structures are put on ground or instituted to provide social and economic infrastructures such as functional and affordable healthcare, electricity, quality education, security of lives and property, environmental protection, portable water, good roads, industries that can create job opportunities, agriculture that will enhance food production among others.

Sen (1999) has argued for an even broader concept of development as an integrated process of expansion of substantive freedoms. Economic growth, technological advancement and political change are all to be judged in the light of their contributions to the expansion of human freedoms. Among the most important of these freedoms are freedom from famine and malnutrition, freedom from poverty, access to health care and freedom from premature mortality. From the foregoing definitions, development implies change or advancement. It also implies continuous process of positive change in the quality of life of an individual or a society, reduction of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

### **2.2.1. Theoretical framework**

The underpinning theory for the study is the Democratic Participatory School of Thought developed by Panter-Brick in 1970. The theory believes that democracy is a way of life that demands that one another's point of view and one another's interest be mutually appreciated (Panter-Brick, 1970). It is a concept that is based on fair-play, tolerance and respect for the right of others, a concept that accepts those to be intrinsically undeniable values (Ola, 1984). It is expected that real democratic governance would be good governance. Good governance amongst other things involve the enthronement of due process, constitutionalism, rule of law, transparency and accountability; respect for constituted authority in the conduct of public affairs. Absence of good governance and its by-products, automatically leads to two or more negative outcomes such as massive corrupt practices, political instability, ill-feelings among the governed, poor performance of development indicators among other negative consequences.

As Muo (2007) notes, none of such outcomes is conducive for development.

It is worthy of note that the theory recognizes the relevance of democracy as the popular choice for enthroning leadership in the local government council as opposed to caretaker committee transition or sole Administrator method being practiced by most governors in the local government areas across the country. The problem is that corruption has been



institutionalized in the local governments and it is reinforced by traits of antidemocratic governance which have prevented community development by the LG administration in the country over the years. Democratic governance guarantees equal participation which is one of the conditions for rapid socio-economic as well as political development at the community level.

### **2.2.2. Empirical Review**

In his work, Obi (2018) carried out an empirical review on State Local Government Relations and Autonomy question: conceptualizing the main issue. The main objective of the paper was to identify the factors that impinge on the autonomy of Local Government in Nigeria. The paper adopted explanatory research design, while secondary means of data collection and descriptive method of analysis were adopted. The finding indicated that the core factors affecting local Government autonomy were the 1999 Constitution, the issue of finance, the state governments and recruitment of Local Government actors. The end result of it was that lack of autonomy adversely affected the development of the grass root as it turned local Government into drain type. The study recommended the amendment of 1999 Constitution among others.

In another development, Kok, Tayed, and Razali (2022) carried an empirical review on Local Government System in Nigeria: legal, fiscal and political overview. The objective of the study was to examine local government in Nigeria from both legal, fiscal and political view point. The study reviewed relevant Literatures relating to supervision, monitoring and control of local Government in line with the 1999 Constitution as amended. The study adopted qualitative study and made an in-depth interview with Government officials and experts. The study observed that the extent to which state government are administering and performing oversight activities over local Government has significantly limited the performances of Local Government. This has necessitated the incessant agitation for granting Local Government Autonomy. The paper however recommended far-reaching refunds that will instill a viable local Government system capable of harnessing Local Government resources towards effective and efficient service delivery.

In a related development, Bolatito & Ibrahim (2012), carried out a study on challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria: An appraisal of Nigeria experience. The study reviewed extant Literature and adopted documentary approach in examining reasons for establishment of Local Government, functions, problems of good governance and accountability. The study used content analysis in the interpretation of its data. The study found out factors militating against the performance of Local Government Administration in Nigeria that made Local Government not to provide the essential services it ought to play in Nigeria. The study made recommendation that includes amendment of the Constitution to empower Local Government Authorities, to provide the much needed goods and services for the people.



### 3.0. METHODOLOGY

The data used for this study was generated from secondary sources. Accordingly, books, journals, periodicals, monographs, seminars and conference papers, unpublished research works, newspapers and magazines, internet materials, etc, constituted the sources of data for the study. Thus, relevant data and information were collated from the foregoing sources and studied. The secondary data were generated in the course of this study were analyzed using content analysis. Content analysis has to do with the rigorous analysis and examination of written records and documents in a critical, analytical, descriptive and explanatory manner so as to make generalizations and meaning from such written records and document. However, content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, quantitative and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication? The central objective of content analysis is to convert recorded data or information into data which can be treated in a scientific manner so that a body of knowledge may be built up. Content analysis as a method of analyzing qualitative data was used in this study to examine Democracy, Leadership in the development of Local Government in Nigeria.

### 4.0. Discourses.

**Table I: South East Local Governments Election**

State	Capital	No. of LGA	Last Time Election was held	Remarks
Abia	Umuahia	17	2015	Operating with TC Chairmen, Sole Administrator system
Anambra	Awka	21	2014	Operating with Sole Administrator and TC Chairmen
Ebonyi	Abakiliki	13	2015	Recently conducted Local Government Election
Enugu	Enugu	17	2015	Operating with Sole Administrator and TC Chairmen
Imo	Owerri	27	2018	Operating with TC Chairmen and Sole Administrator

95

**Source:** Authors compilation (2024)

Analytically, from the above table, it is observed that the interference of the state Governments in the affairs of Local Government in South East is indeed disturbing. They have continued to use transition Committee Chairmen and Sole Administrators to run the affairs of the Local Government System thereby undermining the collective objectives of the people as well as

depriving the rural areas, the basic infrastructural development. It is observed that if Autonomy is given to the Local Governments, they will creditably perform their constitutional duties and utilize Local initiatives to solve local problems.



**Table II: South East States Local Government Election held after Supreme Court Judgement**

State	Capital	No of LGA	Dates of Election	Election Results	Remarks
Abia	Umuahia	17	2 Nov 2024	Zenith Labour party (ZLP) won 15 seats, YPP won 2 seats	It was a “selection” process determined by the Governor
Anambra	Awka	21	October 2024	APGA party won the whole 21 seats	The Governor and his party influenced the process.
Ebonyi	Abakiliki	13	August 2024	APC party won the entire seats	The Governor and his party influenced the process
Enugu	Enugu	17	September 2024	PDP won all the seats	The Governor and his party influenced the process
Imo	Owerri	27	September 2024	APC won all the seats	The Governor and his party influenced the process

**Source:** Author’s Compilation (2024)

However, based on the Supreme Court judgement on the Local Government to have democratically elected Chairmen in the Country, the Local Governments in South East States have conducted their respective elections through a process called “selections” method. The results showed that the Governors with their parties won. Thus, in Abia State, Zenith Labour party won 15 seats, while YPP won 2 Seats. In Anambra State, All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) won the whole seats in the election. Also, in Ebonyi State, APC won the entire Local Government seat. Equally, in Enugu State, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) won the whole seats in the Local Government.

#### **4.2. Nexus of Democracy and Leadership in the Development of Local Government: South-East Experience**

In fact, a further analysis of the parameters and indices of strengthen Democracy and Leadership trajectory in the operations of Local Government system in South East Nigeria, unfold the following:

##### **i. Democratic Process and LG Election in South East**

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 as amended guarantees a ‘system of local government by democratically elected local government councils. Section 7(1) says, “The system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this Constitution guaranteed”. According to Section 7(4), “The Government of a State





shall ensure that every person who is entitled to vote or be voted for at an election to a House of Assembly shall have the right to vote and be voted for at an election to a local government council. Each state House of Assembly makes laws for the procedure, form, and structure of their local governments.” The State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), created by Section 197 as one of the three state executive bodies, conducts elections for the positions of chairman and councilors of all the Local Government Areas. Each of the 5 states in the South East has its SIEC, and they are independent of one another. They conduct the election into the Local Governments of their respective states at different times. The SIECs generally face a gamut of challenges. Although duly provided for in the Constitution, the SIECs operate at the mercy of the State Governors to whom they owe their appointments. They could not operate independently and conduct elections when they were due. In some states, the government claimed not to have funds to conduct LG elections, while others opted to appoint caretaker committees. Many state governments have blatantly refused to constitute the SIEC. Even when inaugurated, they are poorly funded to enable them to perform their constitutional duties.

In addition, many SIECs have operations and activities compounded by fraud and other electoral irregularities. Also, the indictment of local elections as ‘selection, not election,’ by the citizens is a pointer to how the people view the process and outcome of local government elections in the South East of Nigeria.

## **ii. The challenging of Financial Autonomy and Accountability:**

Local Government System in Nigeria particularly in South East have ability to generate revenue without external influence through decentralization. They are empowered to collect rates, radio, markets, park fees, etc as internal revenue spelt out under the fourth schedule, section 7 of the 1999 constitution as amended. They have been given powers to collect rates from their citizens as internal revenue to assist in the provision of services they are to provide in line with the constitution or law. Some LGs shy away from the collection of

rates and licensing of bicycles, trucks, canoes, wheel barrows, carts, etc. The situation is worse in heterogeneous communities and to a less extent, since it is difficult to collect any form of tax or raise revenue in a local government that lacks cohesion, community spirit or homogeneity as seen in those areas because the various elements which make up the local governments regard any form of financial payment as either

imposition or cheating. The 10% state allocation to the local governments as required in section 162 (7) of the constitution is often delayed by State government. Several deductions of local government funds had been made since the establishment of the state Joint Local Government Account. The state-local fiscal relation has been characterized by a poor and ineffective intergovernmental network as local governments did not function properly. Consequently, the local governments did not get enough funds to execute their projects. In fact, the ability of local governments to transform rural communities was hampered because they lost more than half of their statutory funds to the state government. Local government performance



was unsatisfactory. Most of them could not really predict what could come to them as revenue allocations. No local government can pursue development plans, development activities, facilitate democratic self governance, mobilize human and material resources and link the local government to other tiers effectively without predictable source of fund (Onah, 2005). *The Revenue Allocation Act of 1981* provided for statutory allocation of 10% of the federal revenue to local government councils, and this was reviewed upward to 15% and 20% in 1981 and 1992 respectively. The State governments were initially required to allocate 10% of their total revenue and later reviewed to be 10% of their internally generated revenue to local government councils. The local government system in Nigeria represents part of an identified effort at solving perceived problems as it concerns rural development. Local government exists to provide services to the teeming population under its domain, and must be judged by its success in providing the service. The local governments in Nigeria are expected to harness all the available resources in their custody to enable them achieve their stated objectives.

### **iii. The unprecedented deprivation at Rural Areas:**

Knowing fully well that local government is a grassroot government recognized by law, it is very important to know what this grassroot is all about. Grassroot in South East which is commonly known as rural area, are those communities with inhabitants living together in fraternal environment, know to each other and not living in large towns where facilities are closer to them instead, they live under a particular geo-political tradition with a common phenomenal language, common social amenities and possible an ancestral lineage known to one another. In other words, rural areas/communities are those small enclaves known to institutions like schools, churches, markets and other social amenities that involve a local touch or to a rural personality. These communities suffer deprivations or neglect such as: Portable access water, Electricity, Health facilities, Viable & functional schools, Poor hygienic environment, High rate of unemployment, High mortality rate, Incessant insecurity of life and property among the rural dwellers etc.

Indeed, the negative impact of this pitiable dysfunctional infrastructure and deprivation include: Rise in crime, Premature death, High rate of poverty, Food scarcity, Unprecedented disease and other calamities. (Ebiziem 2021).

### **iv. Poor Social Sector**

Apparently, local government, which is charged with the responsibility of alleviating the suffering of the rural dwellers by providing the basic necessities of life like electricity, employment, health care centre, education and good road network etc has failed woefully in the discharge of this responsibilities owing to the fact that corruption has eaten deep into the lives of those who are at the helm of affairs in our various rural communities and this has given rise to conditions such as high rate of unemployment, poverty, crime, high mortality rate and poor hygienic environment. Reacting to this social problems, Adamolekun (1983); advocate for social welfare which denotes full range of organized activities of voluntary and governmental agencies that seek to alleviate and contribute to the solution of re-organized



social problems to improve the wellbeing of individuals, groups or communities. Social welfare in community development, covers a wide range or many aspects of social life such as health care, education, science and technology utilities including water, roads, electricity, communication and transport. These services help to tackle rural problem if well provided. Ebiziem, (2021).

**v. Decayed Economic Sector:**

It is the pivotal point of tackling poverty and unemployment at the rural areas. Most of the local government in the South East has not justify the reason for it's establishment at this sector due to its failure to provide the necessary infrastructures such as roads, electricity supply, water supply Establishment of Industrial estates as may induce accelerated industrial development of the area under their jurisdiction. These infrastructural facilities are necessary not only to induce industrialists to set up business in local government areas but to provide inter- sectorial linkage between agriculture and industry (Ogunna, 1996, Uchegbu 1997).

**vi. Leadership Deficit at the Grassroot:**

The aim for the establishment of the third-tier of government was for the people at the rural areas/communities to participate fully in their governance but today that aim has been defeated. The political and democratic participation has failed in the rural area due to constant distortion of the democratic institution by appointing sole administrators, transition committee chairmen and caretaker committees has continued to violate the leadership role of local government in rural development in South East.

**5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

This paper has scholarly examined the dynamics, complex web of politics and the nexus between strengthen democracy and leadership on Local Government development in South East States of Nigeria's fourth Republic. The study observed that local Government in South East has been bedeviled by several crisis vix, political, institutionally, organizationally and Constitutionally. In fact, the history of local government in South East Nigeria shows that there are problems of governance issues. Over the years, efforts have been made to reform the local government system and increase the participation of the people.

Despite these reforms, there are problems with the local government system. However, these problems are not unique to the local government alone, they are also prevalent at the state and federal levels. The present effort to single out the local government for reform with pre-determined terms of reference smacks of military hangover and may actually lead to democratic reversal in local governance. In order to consolidate the gains made in local governance over the years and reposition local government along certain lines first, local government as a third-tier of government should not be scrapped or changed to local administration. Rather, it should be strengthened and democratized.



In this regard, the recent supreme court judgment on the autonomy of Local Government should be seen as a landmark and stride in promoting the existence of this third tier Government, the judgment has further removed the local government from emasculation, arbitrary interference of the state governors particularly with reference to undemocratically dissolution of the council, state local government joint account and appointment of TC Chairmen and sole administrators among others. Officials of the local government should always be elected and not appointed.

Secondly, there is the need to put a mechanism in place to promote transparency and accountability at all levels of governance. In this regard, it will be crucial to strengthen institutions of horizontal accountability and anti-bodies. In addition, civil society organizations particularly at the local level, should be oriented and empowered to hold elected officials accountable.

Moreover, there is a great need to reform the structure of government at all levels (federal, state and local government). All these will require a comprehensive review of the 1999 constitution as amended. The executive and legislature should display the political will and commitment to reform the 1999 constitution that has been criticized by all strands of society and the reform of the constitution will address other issues that are germane to good governance such as party financing, campaign financing and proper electoral system to mention but a few. Finally, government of the South East should place premium on the participation of the people in all governance and development issues. If all these recommendations are implemented, not only the local government system but also other tiers of government will be in a better footing to deliver what South East in particular and Nigerian in general have termed dividends of democracy.

### **Competing Interest**

The authors had declared that no conflicting interest existed in this paper

### **REFERENCES**

- Acbebe, C. (1983). *The trouble with Nigeria, Enugu*: Fourth Dimension Publishing co. Ltd.
- Adamolekun, L. (1983), *Public Administration: A Nigerian and Comparative Perspective*, New York: Longman
- Adrian (1972). *Encyclopedia of the Social science*.
- Ake, C. (2001). *Democracy and development in Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Appadorai, A. (1975) *the Substance of Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ananti, M. O. (2016). *The caretaker committee approach and service delivery in Anambra State local government councils 2006 – 2014*. An unpublished thesis in the Department of Public Administration, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Igbariam Campus.



- Awa, E. O. (1981), "The *Theory of Local Government*" *Quartly Journal of Administration*, Vol. xv Nos I&II October/January, 1981.
- Berger, P.L. (1976). *Pyramids Sacrifice*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Bolatito S, Ibrahim S. (2012). Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria; An Appraisal of Nigerian Experience. *International Journal of Science and Research*.
- Dalhatu, S. (2006), "*Essays on Local Government Administration: Fostering Better service Delivery, Record Keeping, Accountability and Empowerment at the Local Government*". Kano: Benchmark Publishers
- Ebiziem J.E, (2010) *the new Ehime Political Economy, the rebranding vision*. Owerri, Ambix Printers.
- Ebiziem J.E, Amadi J.C (2018). *The grassroots: Reading on local Government Administration often. An introductional discourse*. Owerri, Ambix Publishers.
- Ebiziem J.E, (2021). *Foundation realities and challenges of local Government Administration in Nigeria*. Owerri, Ambix Publishers.
- Ebiziem J.E, Nwachukwu E.I, Umoh C.O (2023). *Readings in comparative local government administration. A Global perspective*. Owerri Ambix, Publishers
- Emezi, C. (1984), "Local Government in Historical Perspectives" *Nigerian Journal of Public Administration and Local Government*, Vol. II No. II.
- Ezeani, E. O. (2006). *Fundamentals of public administration*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Gboyega, A. (1987), "Political values and Local Government in Nigeria". Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Goulet, D. & Hudson, M. (1971). *The Myth of Aid: The Hidden Agenda of the Development Reports*. New York: Orbis Books
- Igboeche P.I. (2018). *Modern Political Theory: from the evolution of State to the Era of Pan-Africanism*. Owerri, Publisher Career Publishers.
- Nnoli, O. (1981). *Path to Nigerian development*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- Nwabueze, B. O. (1983), "*The Presidential Constitution of Nigeria*" conference paper, ABU, Zaria, March, 1983. Odoh, A. (1991), *Autonomy as a Principle of Local Government Administration*, unpublished PhD Thesis, ABU, Zaria.
- Nwabueze, B. (1982). *A Constitutional History of Nigeria*. London: Longman.
- Ogunna, A.E.C (1996). *A handbook of Local Government in Nigeria*. Owerri: ecVersatile Publishers Ltd. And Uchegbu. U (1997) *Local Government in Nigeria*. Owrri: Versatile Publishers.
- Okereke, O.O . (2003), *Development and Underdevelopment: Politics of the North-South Divide*. Enugu John Jacob's Classic Publishers Limited.





19

Okoli, F.C. (1980). Local Government Reforms and the Dilemma of Individual Participation in Community Development Efforts. *Nigerian Journal of Political Science*, 1(2), 36-45.

Okolie, A.M (2009). *Capitalist development strategy and poverty alleviation in Africa*. Nigerian Journal of Public Administration and Local Government, XIV (1&2); 54-68.

Ola, R.O (1984) *Local Administration in Nigeria*, London: Kegan Paul

18

Onah, F.O. (1995). *Pathologies of Local Government Administration: Man Powers Problems*. In: Ikejiani Clark, M. & Okoli, F.C., (eds) *Local Government Administration in Nigeria: Current Problems and Future Challenges*. Lagos: Academy Press.

Onuigbo, R. A. (2015). State-Local Government Fiscal Relations: Implication for Local Government System in Nigeria. *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management*, 5(3), 91-102.

Oviasuyi, P.O., Idada, W. & Isiraojie, L. (2010). Constraints of Local Governments Administration in Nigeria. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 24(2), 81-86 <https://www.ourheritagereporters.com.ng> NASS (2024).

Panther-Brick, Keith (1970), “*Local Self Government as a basis for Democracy: A rejoinder*” in public Administration, No. 3 Winter.

Philip, O. P. (2009). *Local government authority as catalyst for grassroots emancipation and development*. Being a Ph.D Thesis in the Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Rodney, W (1972). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. London: BogleL “ouverture publication.

Samson, E. and Obamwonyi, S. A. (2015). *State Governors as Albatross to Democracy and Local Self-Government in Nigeria*. *Journal of Policy and Development Studies*, 9(2).

Shamsuddin.B,SiddigBalal.I. (2014). *Challenges of Local Government Administration in Nigeria: An Appraisal of Nigerian Experience*. *International Journal of Science and Research*. 3(7)

Seers, D. (1969). The Meaning of Development, *International Development Review*, 19,(3).

Sen, A. (1999). *Building a Worldwide Movement for Democracy*, keynote address delivered at the Conference of National Endowment for Democracy, the Confederation of Indian Industry, and the centre of Policy Research, New Delhi.

Todaro, M. P. (2003). *(Economic Development*. Eight Low Prize Edition, New Delhi: Pearson Education.

Ugwu, S.C. (2017). *Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: Issues and Constraints*. Inaugural Lecture of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, delivered on April 6th.