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Autonomy of the Local Government and Democratic Governance: An Experience of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999 to 2014)

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Abstract

Nigerian Federalism provides for three levels of government namely: the Federal Government, the State Government, and the Local Government. These levels of government are constitutionally assigned certain responsibilities. To achieve efficient and effective service delivery in government, it has become imperative for local government to be autonomous. In this study, the use of qualitative method was adopted and a review of extant literature was done. The paper argues that, though decentralization and devolution are necessary ingredients for the delivery of the dividends of democratic governance and that excessive interference in the activities of local government by the state government has limited the attainment of democratic governance. Also, the centripetal forces have made the central government to become dominant over other levels of government, which has made local government autonomy a mirage. It identifies factors such as the appointment of sole administrator or caretaker committee, arbitrary removal of local government chairmen by the Governors, withholding of federal allocation to local government, abuse of State-Local Joint Account by the state as impediments to democratic governance at the grassroots. The study recommends constitutional provision that clearly spells out the jurisdiction of the levels of government, direct disbursement of local government allocation by the federal government, removal of State-joint local government account clause from the constitution, assigning tax powers and responsibilities to the local governments; the supremacy of the judiciary in the polity, and efficient Independent Electoral Commission among others.

Keywords: Local government, autonomy, democratic governance, decentralization and devolution.

Résumé

Le fédéralisme nigérian prévoit trois niveaux de gouvernement à savoir: le gouvernement fédéral, le gouvernement de l'État et le gouvernement de la commune. Ces niveaux de gouvernement sont constitutionnellement assignés certaines responsabilités. Pour parvenir à une prestation de services efficiente et efficace au sein du gouvernement, il est devenu impératif que le gouvernement de la commune soit autonome. Dans cette étude, l'utilisation de la méthode qualitative a été adoptée et une revue de la littérature existante faite. L'article soutient le fait que, bien que la décentralisation et la dévolution du pouvoir soient des ingrédients nécessaires pour la répartition des dividendes de la démocratie, l'intervention excessive du gouvernement de l'Etat a limité l'exercice du pouvoir au niveau de la commune. En outre, les forces centripètes ont fait que le gouvernement central est devenu dominant par rapport aux autres niveaux de gouvernement, ce qui rend l'autonomie des

communes ineffective. La présente étude identifie des facteurs tels que la nomination d'un administrateur unique ou d'un comité intérimaire, la destitution arbitraire des maires des communes, la rétention de la part du budget allouée aux communes, l'abus du compte conjoint de l'État et de la Commune par l'État comme entraves à la gouvernance démocratique au niveau local. L'étude recommande une disposition constitutionnelle qui énonce clairement la juridiction des niveaux de gouvernement, le transfert direct des décaissements budgétaires dans les comptes des communes, la suppression de la clause de compte de l'État, la répartition des pouvoirs fiscaux et la dévolution des responsabilités aux communes; la suprématie de la magistrature en politique, et une Commission électorale indépendante et efficace entre autres.

Mots-clés: Commune, autonomie, gouvernance démocratique, décentralisation et déconcentration.

Introduction

Federalism recognizes the existence of at least two levels of government where each level is co-ordinate and independent within its sphere. In Nigeria, the federal arrangement provides for three levels of government namely: the Federal Government, the State Government, and the Local Government. Constitutionally, each level of government has its jurisdiction. For example, the exclusive legislative lists are areas of responsibilities of the central government; the Concurrent lists are areas where the central and the state governments must jointly act on; while the residual lists are areas reserved for the local government.

The need to make government responsible to the demands and aspiration of the people necessitated the idea of decentralization and devolution of powers in a federal system. Therefore, local government has become the barometer to measure the performance of a particular government. In this, Kupoluyi (2013) observed that decentralization brings about efficient and effective public administration. Such efficient public administrative system is better performed by the local government due to its closeness to the populace. According to Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended):

the system of local government by democratically elected Local Government 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 alaw which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

Therefore, this paper seeks to explore whether the current constitutional provisions are sufficient for the attainment of local government autonomy and democratic governance in Nigeria. The paper is structured into six sections starting with this introductory section. The second section is on the conceptual framework, literature review and theoretical orientation. The section that follows is based on local government autonomy and democratic governance in Nigeria's First, Second and Fourth Republics; and federal governments' interference in local government. The fourth section focuses on materials and methods. Section five

analyses the results and makes discussion of the major findings while the last section the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual framework and theoretical orientation

The term "autonomy" is frequently used in democracy and development debate in Nigeria. Granting autonomy underlines the goals of achieving participation of people in the governance, institutionalization of the process of equitable development, capacity building for local government to sustain power and responsibility necessary to formulate and carry out plans and programs (Umenzeakor, 2014). Local government autonomy is the exercise of certain basic powers i.e. police power, power of eminent domain and taxing power by local government units so as to best serve the interest and promote the general wellbeing of the inhabitants (Punch, July 30, 2014). The desire for local government autonomy is a policy instrument to strengthen democracy and to consolidate development from the base which requires continuous assertion of people in public policy. Local government autonomy has been held up by the National Assembly and the various state governments, and therefore requires a focus on rebuilding the country in a way that is expected to promote an efficient state with widespread and ending social project on local development (Umenzeakor, 2014).

Democratic Governance

Central to the concept of democratic governance is the concept of democracy. According to Beetham (1994), democracy is a political concept, concerning the collectivity binding decision about the rules and policies of a group, association or society. It claims that such decision making should be, and it is realized to the extent that such decision making actually is, subject to the control of all the collectivity considered as equal. This definition presupposes that democracy is hinged on the active involvement and participation of the people in governance.

Democratic governance is an effort to make government more responsive to developmental needs. Held (1993) observed that democratic governance has been mired in an unresolved conflict between two meanings. The first conceives democratic governance as a kind of politics in which citizens are engaged in self-government and self-regulation. This perspective holds the view that democratic governance has a basic intent and objectives. These intents such as individual liberty, equality of citizens, fundamental rights can be realized within a variety of processes. Democratic governance must be dedicated to the well-being of the people who should be able to hold leaders accountable and make the people express their wishes and respond to their needs. The second perspective views democratic governance as an aid to decision-making, that is, a means of conferring authority on those periodically voted into office.

Ninalowo (1999) simply puts democratic governance as government that fulfils the terms of its social contract with the people. This kind of governance is *prima facie* legitimate. The basis of legitimization may be any of the following: Constitutionally-enacted legitimization, extra-constitutional mode of legitimization, and socio-political mode of legitimization. He added that what is important for democratic governance is the welfare equation of the

people as the desideratum of governance. In supporting this claim, Adesina (1999) observed that democratic governance can only make meaning when it is characterized by policies that bring about happiness and the good life for the citizenry, accountability of government officials, transparency in government procedures, predictability in government behaviour, expectation of rational decisions by government, openness in government transactions, free flow of information, respect for the rule of law, freedom of the press and decentralization of power.

The Human Development Report 2002 defines 'effective governance' as a set of principles and core values that allow poor people to gain power through participation while protecting them from arbitrary, unaccountable actions in their lives by governments, multinational corporations and other forces. The report highlights the key institutions of democratic governance. First, is a system of representation with well-functioning political parties and interest association. Second, is an electoral system that guarantees free and fair elections as well as universal suffrage. Third, is a system of checks and balances based on the separation of powers, with independent judicial and legislative arms. Four, is a vibrant civil society, able to monitor government and private business and provide alternative forms of political participation. Fifth, is an effective civilian control over the military and other security forces (UNDP, 2002: 4).

Literature Review and Theoretical Orientation

Federalism lays emphasis on the principle of shared rule where the component units perform different functions. Burns (1994) proposed the political framework that has become the dominant explanation for understanding the formation of local governments. The logic underlying her framework is that people form new governments in order to gain access to the powers attached to these units and that the choice between a municipal and special district government hinges on whether or not its proponents seek zoning powers. The 1976 Local Government Reform defines local government as government at local level exercised through representative council, established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff, institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services (Kaita, 2012).

Under a true federalist structure, the autonomy of local government should be adequately guaranteed, although, Nigerian federalism is associated with problem of autonomy at the local government level which includes administrative autonomy, constitutional autonomy, legal and financial autonomy (Akinboye, 2007). Fiscal or financial autonomy is essential in every organization because the engine room of every organization is finance. In the words of Meyer (1996), the backbone of local government is financial autonomy. As soon as local governments have to live on income derived primarily from the federal government, the future of local government does not seem bright. Local governments in Nigeria have become an appendage of federal and state governments due to lack of financial autonomy. According to Materu (2002), lack of fiscal autonomy is due to the inadequacy of legal framework and constitutional provisions to guarantee the autonomy of local government. Therefore, for local government to perform the function of service delivery, it must be guaranteed some measure of financial control within its jurisdiction. In the Nigerian context,

local government autonomy has been explained under three perspectives. First is that local government autonomy means independence from the interference of state governments in the activities of local government. Second is that local government autonomy deals with non-interference of the federal government in the activities of local government. Third is that local government autonomy means independence from both state and federal governments' interference in the activities of local councils (Akpan&Ekanem, 2013).

The consequence of increasing governmental powers at the centre over the sub-national levels has necessitated the idea of decentralization. Decentralization is a shift from top-down governance towards bottom-up governance (Ferguson &Chandrasekharan, 2004:3). It entails the transplantation of power and responsibility from the centre to sub-national units of government (Enemuo, 1999:34). Decentralization denotes "the organization of government activity outside the headquarters of the central government either as an administrative measure involving the transfer of resources and responsibilities to agents of the central government located outside the headquarters or as a political arrangement involving devolution of specific powers, functions and resources by the central government to sub-national units (Adamolekun, 1990). Decentralization is a process of transferring power to popularly elected local governments (Centre for Democracy and Governance, 1998:6).

In order to have an understanding of the nature, structure and operation of local government, the theory that suits this study is power theory. The proponents of power theory are Wilfredo Pareto, Mosca, Robert Michels, Wright Mills, James Burnham. Each of them holds that power in each society is in the hands of a minority or some particular social groups which are powerful (Ajulor & Okewale, 2011). Power is relational and can be defined as non-divisible unit of energy which is capable of causing a change in the actions of its victim in spite of the victim's opposition to the change (Ajulor & Okewale, 2011). Power theory assumes that the responsibility of each unit of government is to promote the interest of its people against the opposition of other units (Ajulor & Okewale, 2011). Partridge (1970) observes that power can be seen from two perspectives i.e. influence and domination. On influence, there is element of conflicts and degree of subordination of one man's desires or interests to those of others. On domination, power assumes direct control of behaviour of one by other and in which he acts because the former want him to act even though he does not want to act that way. This theory fits the Nigerian experience of local government institution because there is excessive control and domination of either the federal or state government on the local government. In some cases, government projects that are not community or locally oriented are enforced on the local government by other levels of government.

Local Government Autonomy and Democratic governance in Nigeria's First Republic

The First Republic in Nigeria was the period after independence (1960-1966). During this period, the administration of local government was under the jurisdiction of the regional government. By constitutional design, the regional government had powers over residual matters. Residual matters were those that were not in either the Exclusive or Concurrent list.

The structure of the sharing of duties in the first republic was a flow over from the colonial division (Dudley, 1982). The provision for control of residual issues by the regional government did not make the regions strong. This was because most of the important duties were listed either under the exclusive or concurrent list. One thing that was important was that the various levels of government were very clear over their areas of jurisdiction. The regional government had powers to collect taxes as contained in the constitution. Also, the regions could receive grants from the federal government for purpose of project development. On the power of taxation, the central government was better placed than the component regional governments, simply because the constitution gave it power over issues concerning internal and external borrowing. For the regions, income tax was not a strong source of revenue due to low earnings of workers (Okereke, 2012). The control and administration of the local level of government was squarely a regional affair. The various regions carry out the creation, staffing, and general structuring of local affairs management. Each region had its own pattern that to some extent differed from what obtained in the other regions. The multi-tier system of local government that existed in Britain was copied by the Eastern and Western regions with the establishment of County, District, and local council areas or units. The Northern region based on strong traditional attachment retained the colonial system known as Native Authority for management of local affairs under the first republic (Okereke, 2012).

The various regions, based on the constitution determined the financing, staffing and organization of the local governments. Care-taker Committees were set up in the Eastern and Western regions, for the management of local affairs. The overall implication was that local authorities in the First Republic lacked any form of control over the management of local affairs (Oshisami, 1992).

There was no constitutional provision as regards the finances, staffing and organization of local authorities. Each regional government through ordinances determined how the local authorities functioned, and how the system was operated. The local authorities remained the babies of the regional governments, and their activities were insignificant as regards the functions of resource mobilization and support in efficient service delivery. It could be said that at the local level in the first republic constituted a veritable ground for compensating political loyalists who were appointed sole administrators and care-taker committee members (Denhardt, 1995).

Local Government Autonomy and Democratic Governance in the Second Republic

The affairs of local government were handed over to the states while the states embarked on indiscriminate creation of local governments. The central government was involved in the local government affairs to the extent of determination of the statutory revenue that would be allocated to the local government through the revenue allocation formula. The states were able to engage on indiscriminate creation of local governments areas based primarily on political interest (Denhardt, 1995).

So, state governments misappropriated funds meant for the use by local governments. Consequently, many local governments could not pay staff salaries for months. In addition, state governments refused to obey the constitution on the election of local government council members. Instead, Caretaker committees were established to manage the affairs of

the various local government areas. The caretaker committees consisted mainly of party faithful who were rewarded for their contributions to the party (Denhardt, 1995). The critical functions of resource mobilization, enhancing political participation and aiding in efficient delivery of government services could not be effectively performed by the LGs under the circumstance, which existed in the Second Republic. The state-local government joint account negated the provision for statutory allocation to the local government (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2005).

Local Government Autonomy and Democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The Fourth Republic witnessed all forms of arbitrary rule and assault on the local government by the higher levels of government. This arbitrary rule and assault seriously contended with the autonomy and democratic governance at the grassroots level. For example, the federal government failed to comply with the order of the Supreme Court which directed that the Lagos State Councils' fund be released to the Lagos State Government and restraining the Federal government and any functionary of the federal executive branch from withholding the funds. The federal executive has stated that it would not release the funds until Lagos State reverts to the twenty previous existing local government councils (Lagos State Government, 2002). This arbitrary revisionism is an assault on section 235 of the 1999 constitution; which provides for the finality of determination by the Supreme Court. The section states that:

Without prejudice to the powers of the President or the Governor of a State with respect to prerogative of mercy, no appeal shall lie to any other body or person from any determination of the Supreme Court (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999).

It should be noted that every administrative act has its **financial implications**. The dwindling financial resources of local government and the **delay in the release of fund** in the Fourth Republic set a limit on administrative capacity. **Therefore, the dividends of democracy** could not be enjoyed by the populace. The lack of **financial autonomy** at the local level has made democratic governance a mirage in the Fourth Republic. For example, the 774 local governments have approached the judicial quarters over the lack of financial autonomy. In line with this, Akinboye (2007: 234) states that:

One of the nagging problems of Nigeria's federalism is the persistent failure to grant fiscal autonomy to local government as a third tier of government. Under the true federalist structure, the autonomy of local government is adequately guaranteed.

In addition, local governments in the Fourth Republic have been rendered financially impotent by the state governments due to abuse and acts of gross misconduct. For example, Section 162, sub-section 6 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution asserts that each state shall maintain a special account to be called "State Joint Local Government Account" into which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the State from the

Federation Account and from the Government of the State. Thus, the state governments delay the monthly allocation of local government councils and siphon their funds for private use (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2009: 105). The implication of this as noted by Fatile and Adejuwon (2009: 105) is that local government council cannot exercise the functions allocated to it in the fourth schedule of the Constitution until the State House of Assembly has passed a law, which empowers the local government councils to perform those functions listed in the fourth schedule of the Constitution.

There is a great divergence between the constitutional provision and the actual practice in the mode of choosing the officials at the local government councils in the Fourth Republic. Section 7(1) guarantees the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils. This implies that officials at the local level are to be elected by the electorates. However, this is contrary to what operates in the Fourth Republic as most local representatives are chosen at the whims and caprices of "political godfathers". To support this claim, Thovethin and Adio (2011: 179-180) observed that successful candidates are often those who are "sponsored" by wealthy and powerful individuals known in Nigerian parlance as "political godfathers". These godfathers are not mere financiers of political campaigns rather to deploy violence and corruption to manipulate national, state or local political systems in support of the politicians they sponsor. In return, they demand a substantial degree of control over the governments they help to bring into being not in order to shape government policy, but to exact direct financial "returns" (Thovethin & Adio, 2011: 179-180).

Corroborating this claim, Akhere (2005) argues that there is an apparent absence of truly elected local government councils at the grassroots in view of the pervasive electoral fraud, coupled with the overwhelming role of party politics.

State and Federal Governments' Interference in Local Government Autonomy in the Fourth Republic

The undue interference by the State and Federal Governments on the Local Government affairs has become a major threat to the sustenance of local government autonomy and democratic governance in the Fourth Republic. The interference which is more noticed at the state level especially with the state executive has retarded development at the local level. Therefore, the dividends of democracy could not be attained (Abia, 1991).

Under the 1979 constitution, the creation of local government councils appears to be the prerogative of the state government. For instance, section 7 (1) of the constitution empowers the state to ensure the existence of local government council through state instrument which provides for its establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions (Ajulor & Okewale, 2011). The 1989 Constitution that follows allows some degree of autonomy for local government by reducing the power of the state to exercise control on the local government. With the return to democratic government in 1999, the constitution was silent on the dissolution of the local government. Thus, the Fourth Republic has witnessed arbitrary dissolution or removal or suspension of Local Government officials by the state government in areas where election takes place. For example, the Chairman of Okpe Local Government Area in Delta State was suspended by the State House of Assembly for

mismanagement of fund. In Zamfara State, the Chairman of Tsafe Local Government was suspended for allegedly stealing fifty three million Naira (Aluko, 2006). On March 2010, 12 out of the 23 Local Government Chairmen in Benue State were recommended for suspension for alleged misappropriation of funds (The News Magazine, 2010).

In the same vein, the Governor of Niger State also suspended Chairman of Kontagora Local Government, Abdulhammed El-Wazir. In Edo and Kwara States, the Chairmen of Egho Local Government, Crosby Eribo and Ilorin West Local Government, Usman Bibire Ajape were suspended by their respective State Governors in manners suggestive of executive excesses. Similarly, some elected council members were suspended in 2000 by the Kaduna State Government (Ojo, 2005). It was all these that infuriated the Local Government Chairmen which made them to sue the 36 governors and their state assemblies (Fadeyi, 2001).

Democratic governance and autonomy at the local level has also been threatened by the undue interference of the federal government. There is the case of federal government and Lagos state local government councils where the former withheld the statutory allocations from the Federal Account meant for the benefit of the Lagos State Local Government Councils. In spite of the Supreme Court judgement directing the Federal Government to release the withheld funds, the federal government disobeyed the court orders. This action of the federal government is an act of violation of the rule of law and it is a way of subverting the peace, stability and good governance of the country (Abia, 1991).

Specifically, local government autonomy and democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic has been inhibited due to the following factors (Abia, 1991). First is the Governors excessive control. Governors have assumed the role of determining the winner of election at the local government level. Governors have no moral justification to conduct free and fair election at the local government because it is only the anointed government candidates with low public rating that wins an election. Second is the introduction of "money bags in politics". Democracy is supposed to be the rule of the majority but the influx of "money bags" into politics has undermined democracy as a game of numbers. Monetary inducements are introduced by the Governors or the President to convince party supporters and opposition. Third is the State-Local Joint Account. The constitutional provision that state and local governments should jointly hold an account has made the former to always take advantage of the latter by delaying local government monthly allocation which has made service delivery to be ineffective at the grassroots level.

Research Methodology

The Study Area

The study was conducted in four local government areas of Osun State. The four local governments which are located in Osun East Senatorial district include Ife Central, Ife South, Ife North and Atakumosa West. The four local governments were carved out of old

Oranmiyan local government in the defunct Western region. The justification for choosing these local governments was partly due to the historical experience shared by the four local governments and their proximity to one another within the same geographical area.

Study Population

The study population is made up of male and female members of the four local governments. The study population cuts across the demographic characteristics of the respondents such as sex, age and marital status. A total of 100 questionnaire was administered in the four local governments on equal basis. However, 85 questionnaires were filled and returned which was made up of 23, 21, 20, and 21 in Ife Central, Ife South, Ife North and Atakumosa West Local Governments respectively. The questionnaire sought to find out the nature of local government autonomy and democratic governance in the Fourth Republic, relationship between local government and other levels of government, the interference of other levels of government on the local government; and elections at the local government level. Both closed and open ended questions were raised in the questionnaire. The closed ended items were on a 4-Likert scale format of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Sampling Technique

The sampling technique adopted for the study was purposive random sampling. The respondents were purposively selected from all the wards of the four local governments. The representatives of the population were then categorized into male and female, married and single. The primary data collected through the use of structured questionnaire was designed to achieve the objectives of the study. The central idea of this study was to explore whether the current constitutional provisions are sufficient for the attainment of local government autonomy and democratic governance in Nigeria.

Research Instrument

Qualitative technique was adopted in the collection of data for the study. The research instrument employed for data collection was questionnaire. The structured questionnaire sought to find out from the respondents the nature of local government autonomy and democratic governance in the Fourth Republic, relationship between local government and other levels of government, the interference of other levels of government on the local government; and elections at the local level. Both closed and open ended questions were administered to 100 respondents who are both male and female in order to generate data on study. The closed ended items were on a 4-Likert scale format of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. A descriptive method was used to analyze the closed ended items based on percentages. Also, the data from open ended questions were qualitatively analyzed. Descriptive method was adopted in analyzing the data collected. The reason for the use of descriptive methodology in this study is to give a completely detailed description of the topic under consideration, and to understand and interpret social interactions. Descriptive methodology gives a mental picture of what the researcher is seeing. Descriptive methodology which is qualitative in nature provides an in-depth understanding of the world as seen through the eyes of the people being studied (Wilmot, 2011: 1).

Results and Discussion/Findings

Table1: Demographic characteristics of the Sample by Sex

SEX	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE (%)
MALE	55	64.7
FEMALE	30	35.3
TOTAL	85	100.0

Source: Researcher Field Survey (2014)

The outcome of the demographic characteristics of the respondents as presented on the table 1 indicated that 64.7% represented the male respondents while 35.3% represented the female respondents. Although, differences exist in the distribution of male and female respondents across the four local governments. It was discovered that a greater percentage of the respondents were from male gender. This is an indication that the population of male participants is greater than the female participants.

Table2: Demographic characteristics of the Sample by Age

AGE (YEARS) PERCENTAGE (%)	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	
21-30	17	20
31-40	32	37.6
41-50	20	23.6
51-60	16	18.8
TOTAL	85	100.0

Source: Researcher Field Survey (2014)

In Table 2, it was observed that the age range of the respondents is between 21 years and 60 years. The highest percentage of the respondent was from the age category 31-40 years while the lowest respondent was from 51-60 years. The table also shows that a large number of the respondents were from age group 21-50 years. This is an indication that younger people participated more than the older ones.

Nature of Local Government Autonomy

The first research question was based on whether local government is autonomous

Table 3: Local government is autonomous in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	%(S A)	%(A)	%(DISAGREE)	%(STRONGLY DISAGREE)
IFE CENTRAL	6	-	-	17	26.1	-	-	73.9
IFE SOUTH	-	8	-	13	-	38.1	-	61.9
IFE NORTH	-	7	13	-	-	35	65	-
ATAKUMOSA WEST	-	6	-	15	-	28.6	-	71.4
TOTAL	6	21	13	45				

Source: Researcher Field Survey (2014)

With respect to the autonomous nature of local government in the Fourth Republic, Table 3 above shows that in all the local governments, a greater percentage of the respondent was of the opinion that local governments in the Fourth Republic were not autonomous. For example, in Ife Central local government 73.9 per cent indicated that local governments were not autonomous while 26.1 per cent were of the opinion that local governments were autonomous. In Ife South, 61.9 per cent strongly disagree that local governments were autonomous and 38.1 per cent agreed that local governments were autonomous at the local level. The same is applicable to Ife North where 65 per cent of the respondents indicated that local governments were not autonomous while 35 per cent responded that local governments were autonomous. In Atakumosa West, 71.4 per cent responded that local governments were not autonomous while 28.6 per cent responded that local governments were autonomous.

Relationship Between Local Government and other Levels of Government
The second research question focused on whether there is a cordial relationship between local government and other levels of government in the Fourth Republic. The analysis of the result is shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: There is a cordial relationship between local government and other levels of government in the Fourth Republic.

Local Governments	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	% (SA)	% (A)	% (DISA)	% (SD)
IFE CENTRAL	-	5	-	18	-	21.7	-	78.3
IFE SOUTH	6	-	15	-	28.6	-	71.4	-
IFE NORTH	-	6	-	14	-	30.0	-	70.0
ATAKUMOSA WEST	-	4	17	-	-	19.0	81.0	-
TOTAL	6	15	32	32				

Source: Researcher Field Survey, 2014

The table 4 above indicates that in Ife Central, 78.3 per cent strongly disagree that there is a cordial relationship between local government and other levels of government while 21.7 per cent agree with the above statement. In Ife South 71.4 per cent disagree while 28.6 per cent strongly agree. Also, 70 per cent of the respondents strongly disagree while 30 per cent agree in Ife North. In Atakumosa West, 81 per cent disagree while 19 per cent agree. The analysis given above implies that there is no cordial relationship between the local government and other levels of government in the Fourth Republic.

The Interference of other Levels of Government on Local Government

The respondents were asked to state the nature of interference of other levels of government on local government and the results of analysis are presented in the table below.

Table 5: Nature of interference of other levels of government on local government

Nature of interference	Responses (%)
Illegal dissolution of local government executives by the state government	70.6
Delaying and withholding of local governments allocation by the state and federal governments	85.5
Appointments of caretaker committee into local governments by the state government instead of election	55
Suspension or removal of local governments Chairmen	45.5
Snatching of revenue areas of local governments by the state government	65.5

Source: Researcher Field Survey (2014)

Delaying and withholding of local governments allocation by the state and federal governments scored highest with regard to the nature of interference by the federal and state governments on local government, while the lowest with 45.5% admitted to suspension or removal of local governments' Chairmen. Other reasons adduced by the respondents were illegal dissolution of local government executives(70.6%), appointment of caretaker committee into local governments instead of election (55%), and snatching of revenue areas of local government by the state government (65.6%). This is a clear indication that the state and federal governments exert too much influence on the local governments. Therefore, democratic governance at the local level is epileptic.

Elections at the Local Government

This study also seeks to find out the frequency at which election is conducted at the local government level and the table 6 below indicates the analysis of results.

Table 6: Frequency of election at the local government level

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS	Regularly	Occasionally	Not regular
IFE CENTRAL	-	5	21
IFE SOUTH	-	-	21
IFE NORTH	-	-	18
ATAKUMOSA WEST	-	-	20
TOTAL	-	5	80

Source: Researcher Field Survey, 2014

In the above table, it was discovered that a large number of respondents in all the local governments were of the opinion that elections at the local government level were not regular. A total of 94.1 per cent of the respondents shared the opinion that there was no regular election at the local government level. The implication of this was that there was no adherence to the constitutional provisions by the state government with regard to the conduct of election at the local government level. Hence, autonomy at the local government level has become a myth rather than reality.

Conclusion

The study aimed at determining the nature of local government autonomy and democratic governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The study found that autonomy and democratic governance at the local level are questionable. In the evolution of local government in

Nigeria, particularly from the First Republic, regional government had control over the affairs of local government. The creation of states out of the existing regions further weakened the local governments. Although, one would have expected a turn-around in the institution of local governments after the 1976 reform. Unfortunately, State governments in the Second Republic did not give recognition to the local governments because state governors prefer Caretaker committees to elected officers at the local government level. This has eroded the autonomy of local government mainly because the local government has always depended on the state and federal governments for sustenance. Thus, local government autonomy in Nigeria has been daunting, even in the Fourth Republic. With the return to democratic governance in May 1999, the Constitution places the bulk of the financial burden of the local government on both the federal and state governments (Section 7(6) of the 1999 Constitution). Local Government in the Fourth Republic is still an appendage of state and federal governments. The undue interference by other levels of government in local government affairs has become a major threat to the sustenance of local government autonomy and democratic governance. Such interference by other levels of government ranges from illegal dissolution of local governments executive, delaying and withholding of local governments. The position of the paper on Nigerian Federalism viz-a-viz true federalism is that Nigerian federalism is centripetal where power is tilted towards the center to the detriment of the component units. The centripetal forces have made the central government to become dominant over other levels of government. However, true federalism would allow centrifugal forces to prevail, a system where the regions or component units had total control over their jurisdictions. This was a true federalism that existed in the First Republic before the military government intervened in politics in 1966.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made.

First is that the power of conducting local government election should be removed from the hands of state chief executives back into the hands of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This will prevent arbitrary appointment by the state governors of their favourites into various positions at the local level. Second is that there is the need to overhaul the constitution in order to address and curb the excesses of state chief executives over local government administration. In other words, the ambiguities contained in the 1999 constitution which made the third tier of government to lose its autonomy should be removed.

Third is that direct disbursement of local government allocation should be made by the federal government. The idea of State-joint local government account should be discarded. Also, monitoring of the use of funds and implementation of projects embarked upon by the local government should be done by different government agencies.

Fourth, local government should be constitutionally assigned with tax powers and responsibilities; and free from the control of either the state or federal government.

Finally, the court of law should be made to prevail over any undue interference on the local

government by other levels of government.

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