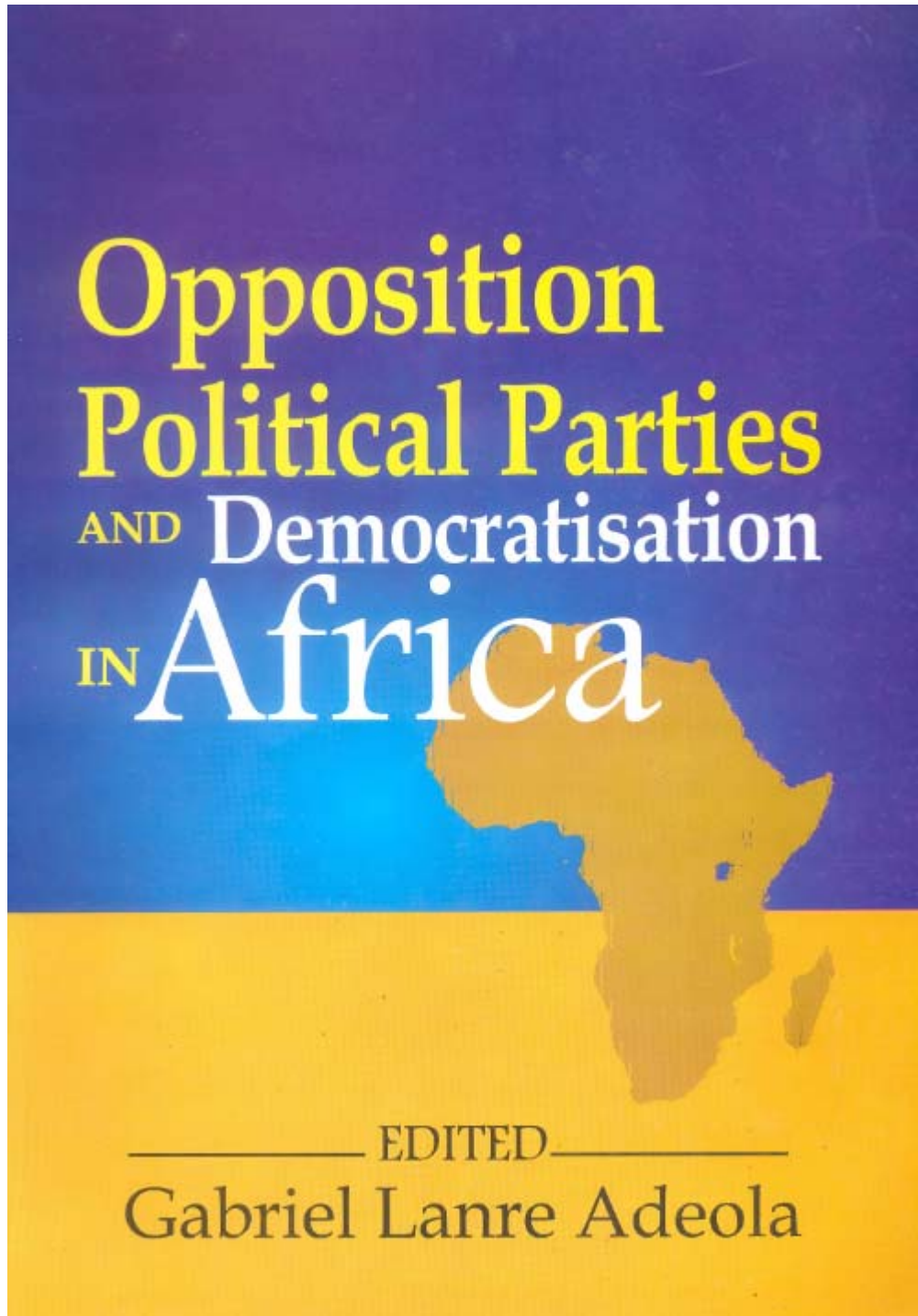


OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN AFRICA—

G.L. ADEOLA (ED.)



Copyright, ADEOLA, G. L. (PhD, Paris)

Contact

Department of Social Sciences
Political Science and International Relations' Programme, Crawford University,
Faith City, P. M. B. 2001, Igbesa, Ogun State, Nigeria

Published by ADLA Communications Limited, Ikeja

E-mail: adlacomunications@yahoo.com, adlaworldsystems@gmail.com

P.O. Box 112, Ikeja, Lagos

First printed August, 2014

ISBN 978-2463-08-9

Printed and Designed by Emmis Press 47B, New Ipaja Road, Iyana – Ipaja, Lagos

Phone: +234 706 274 41 04

16: The Travails of Party System and Opposition Political Parties in Democratisation Process in Nigeria <i>Felix Olanrewaju Awosika</i>	185
17: Patriarchy, Violence, and the Politics of God-Fatherism in Nigeria. <i>Chidiebere James Onwutuebe</i>	193
18: Religion and Opposition against Socio-Political and Religious Injustice in Nigerian Context. <i>David O. Alabi and Hassan O. Oripeloye</i>	203
19: Enhancing Local Government Political Autonomy through effective Opposition Political Parties in Nigeria. <i>Friday Francis Nchuchuwe</i>	213
20: Opposition Party and Local Government Administration in Nigeria. <i>M.A.O Obi and C. Anthony Okolie</i>	227
21: The Rise and Fall of One-Party Dominant System in Nigeria <i>Tunde Oseni</i>	241
22: Party System and Opposition Politics in Igboland in the Second Republic. <i>Uche Uwaezuoke Okonkwo</i>	253
23: Intergovernmental Relations and Opposition in Nigeria. <i>Jacob Olufemi Fatile</i>	263
24: Opposition Parties and External Relations: The Nigerian Example of the First Republic. <i>Adele J. Bamgbose</i>	277
25: Freedom, Rights, Equality and Democracy in Post-Independence Nigeria: The Case of Opposition Political Parties. <i>Felix E. Oghi</i>	301
26: Trade Unionism, Popular Participation and the Nigeria Democratic Process. <i>Justice Chidi Ngwama</i>	309
27: The Paroxysmal of Opposition Parties in Nigeria's Polity: Issues and Challenges. <i>Mashood Omotosha</i>	325
28: Opposition Parties and Democratization Process in Africa: Nigeria and Ghana in Perspective. <i>Michael B. Aleyomi</i>	343
29: Political Leadership and Economic Development in Africa and Asia: A Comparison of Nigeria and Indonesia. <i>Asuquo Edet Ekpe and Gibson Daasi</i>	359
30: Opposition Party and Governance in Africa. <i>Uchenna Samuel Nzeako</i>	371

ENHANCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLITICAL AUTONOMY THROUGH EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA

FRIDAY FRANCIS NCHUCHUWE

Introduction

The success of any country's socio-economic and political development depends not only on central government(s) but also on the effectiveness and efficiency of local government. The effectiveness of local government depends on how much power it can exercise and the frequency or scope of its service delivery. The power of local government is concerned with legal authority, financial autonomy, central-local relation, . personality and politics (Mohammad and Chowdhury, 2012). Local government administration shapes the fate of modern democracy; because it is a medium where interest groups in the state take and resolve their claims to political power through peaceful means. Local government in Nigeria is the third tier of government that serves as a vehicle for its rural transformation. The philosophy of local government stems from the fact that it is the government closer to people in the grass root in a political setting, and the best system to engage people in their own governance (Nnamani and Anikwe, 2013).

The local government system in Nigeria is problematic. The problem expresses itself in the law establishing local government, its structure and the kind of autonomy both the federal and state governments' devolve to it as the third tier of government (Akpan and Ekanem, 2013). Though there is no political system where the local unit is totally free from the regulation of the central or regional or state government. However, they do not interfere negatively by usurping the financial resources of the local councils and misappropriating them as it is currently being done in Nigeria. There is never a time

that local government in Nigeria has been granted the kind of autonomy that is expected of local government as the third tier of government. The kind of autonomy the central or regional government entrust to the local units depend largely on the nature and character of state politics. This chapter therefore set out to examine the role of opposition political parties in ensuring local government autonomy in Nigeria.

Local Government Defined

Local Government is a grassroot government recognized by law. It is the closest tier of government to the people in any society. Local Government is defined severally by authors and bodies. It is a sub-unit of government controlled by a local council which is authorized by the National government to pass ordinances having a local application. Agagu (2001) defined local government as a government at the grass root level of administration meant for meeting peculiar grass root needs of the people. In Nigeria there is one federal government with jurisdiction over larger people with different traditional background and beliefs, but the lowest unit of administration whose laws and regulations bound on the people in the geographical areas is the local government. Olowu (1988) states that local government is a political subdivision of a nation state constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs to impose taxes for prescribed purposes, the governing body of such entity is elected. In the view of Akpan (1972) local government as the breaking down of a country into small units or localities for the purpose of administration on which the inhabitants of the different units or localities concerned play a direct and full part through their elected representatives who exercise power or undertake functions under the general authority of the national government."

Adeyeye (2000) defines local government in the unitary state as "non-sovereign community possessing the legal right but which are essentially administrative agents of the central government". While Lawal (2000), sees local government as the tier of

government closest to the people and is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of people in its domain. It is expected to play the role of promoting the democratic ideals of a society and coordinate development program at the local level as a basis for socio economic development in the locality. According to Ajayi (2000), local government is one of the free institutions that provide political education, a plank by which grass roots politics can be promoted, a vehicle for political training and leadership qualities fostered in young politicians at the local level.

The implications of the above definitions are in four dimensions, these include:

- Local government must be a legal entity distinct from the state and federal government.
- Local government must be administered by democratically elected officials.
- Local government must have specific powers to perform a range of functions assigned it by law.
- Local government must enjoy substantial autonomy to perform array of functions, plan, formulate and execute its own policies, programmes and projects, and its own rules and regulations as deemed for its local needs. This autonomy includes power to control its finance, recruit and discipline its staff.

Based on these definitions, and their implications, could it be said that the local government system in Nigerian is autonomous?

Local Government Autonomy

Local government autonomy can be defined as the freedom of the local government to recruit and manage its own staff, raise and manage its own finances, make by-laws and policies, and discharge its functions as provided by law without interference from the higher governments (Ogunna, 1996). Local autonomy is in dilemma in all contemporary societies. In the view of Onofrei (2007), that local autonomy is associated with the

establishment of a distinct status of local communities and authorities in relation to state administration, revealing the degree of independence of local authorities in relation to central government.

Two types of autonomy appear to have been canvassed in the literature; absolute and adequate/relative. Chaturvedi (2006:19) represents the absolutist school as he states that 'in local autonomy, the local body has financial and management autonomy' to decide and determine its own course of action. There is no rider whatsoever. Mawhood (1993:8) straddles both schools because he insists that there is relative separation of central and local spheres of government on the one hand. On the other hand, he says that the central government should only 'monitor the activities of local authorities without intruding into their domain.'

Local government autonomy is important because it is a necessary condition for three crucial roles that local government plays, that is, a value maximizer; an institution that potentially allows citizens to reveal their preferences for public expenditures; and, as a competitor with other jurisdictions so that efficiency conditions are satisfied. Local autonomy is a necessary condition for interjurisdictional competition.

Nwabueze (1983) defines the autonomy under any federal system of government to mean that each tier of government enjoys a separate existence and independence from the control of the other governments. He said that it is an autonomy which requires not just the legal and physical existence of an apparatus of government like a Legislative Assembly, Governor, Court etc, but that each government must exist not as an appendage of another government but as autonomous entity in the sense of being able to exercise its own will in the conduct of its affairs free from directive from another government.

Within the Nigerian context, the 1976 local government reforms gave the people not only the definition of local government, but also the basic rudiments of local government autonomy. The 1976 reform defines local government as:

Government at the local level exercised through Representative Council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff... institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects so as to implement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas, and to ensure, through devolution of these functions to these Councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

The above definition brings out the key elements of local government autonomy. First, the local government unit should have a legal personality distinct from the state and federal governments. Second, the local government ought to have specified powers and functions distinct from the state and federal governments. Third, the local government has to operate independently of the state and federal governments. That means that the local government is not an appendage or field office of the state or federal government. Fourth, local government ought to have the ability to make its own laws, rules and regulations. Fifth, local government should have the ability to formulate and execute its own policies and the right to recruit, promote, develop and discipline its own staff.

Opposition Political Parties

A properly functioning constitutional democratic system is about choice. In such a system, there must be a constant reminder to the populace that there is a viable alternative to the incumbent political grouping that holds the potential of moving the country onto a qualitatively higher development plan. The institutions and bodies that play this role are generally referred to loosely as opposition.

Karpen (1996) is of the view that opposition in political life is a political counter-power which attempts to convince the majority that its values and goals are better; it tries to remove the majority legally or even illegally from power. Opposition is the fundamental bases for the development of democracy, as it recognizes rights for political and social actors to publicly criticize and challenge the government in its actions and policies. Opposition party is a system where two opposing political parties are opposing or resisting, being in conflict; antagonism, being in contrast with another, an obstacle. It involves two political parties or an organized group opposed to the group, party, or government in power. A body of opposites; specifically, those members of a legislative body who are opposed to the administration for the time being, or the political party opposed to the party in power, frequently used adjectively: as, an opposition scheme; the opposition benches in the British House of Commons.

It has long been acknowledged by democratic theorists that the principle of legitimate political opposition is one of the most fundamental components of any liberal democracy. Opposition parties are partisan political institutions that are intentionally designed to temper the ruling party's excesses while still pursuing both legislative and presidential offices (Dolo, 2006).

Opposition has historically taken different forms depending on the different ideological traditions and the socio-economic realities of the society in question. Opposition parties are organised political groupings within a democracy that do not currently hold power. They serve as the 'government-in-waiting', contesting the current government with the aim of seizing power at the next election. Thus, opposition parties are formalised political groups that possess the capacity of winning sufficient votes at the next election to remove the sitting government and seize power (Adam, 2012:383). Opposition parties are also defined as minority parties that do not wield executive power, but act as a check on governments (Bgbín, 2008). The role of an opposition party in a democracy is to check and poke, and to replace the incumbent party.

Evolution and Development of Local Government Administration in Nigeria

The expediency for the creation of local government anywhere in the world stems from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots. The importance of local government is a function of its ability to generate sense of belongingness, safety and satisfaction among its populace. The local government system is specially designed to bring governance close to the people at the grassroots. The need to enhance efficiency and workability of the system led to the reforms in the local government administration in Nigeria.

The history of local government system in Nigeria could be traced back to the pre-colonial period when powerful empires and kingdoms existed in Nigeria, such as; Oyo Empire, Borno Empire, Sokoto Empire, Jukun Kingdom, Nupe Kingdom, and Igala Kingdoms, among others. These empires and kingdoms had other smaller districts, wards, towns and villages which were subjected to them. The subordinate governments operated their own unique administration suitable for their cultural and religious needs and aspirations. The bulk of the administrative activities of these kingdoms and empires took place at these levels (Asaju, 2010:102). In the Northern part of the country, the Hausa cum Fulani practices a highly centralized form of government with the Emir at the head as both the political and religious leader. The Emir however delegates his power to district heads (The Magajis) to oversee the districts that made up the emirates. In the Western part of the country, the Obas firmly held power over towns (Okoli, 2000).

From his own point of view, Nwabueze (1982) upheld that regardless of nomenclature, local government is a creation of British colonial rule in Nigeria. It has overtime experienced change in name, structure and composition. Between 1930s and 1940s, for instance, local government was known as chief-in-council and chief-and-council, where traditional rulers were given pride of place in the scheme of things. In the 1950s, election was introduced according to the British model in the western and eastern parts of the country with some measure of autonomy in personnel, finance and general

administration. It was on this premise that the rising tide of progress, growth and development experienced in the local governments in these areas was based. The pace of this development was more noticeable in the south than in the north. During this period, heterogeneity was the hallmark of local government as there was no uniformity in the system and the level of development was also remarkably different.

The local government system in Nigeria has experienced several reforms since the early 1950s. During that period, the system was modernized and constituted on a representative basis. Colonial local administration revolved around traditional rulers, with the unit of local administration referred to as the native authority. Executive authority lay with the district officer. The authorities at that time created administrative organizations that were ad hoc in nature. However, some success of this type of administration was noticeable in the centralized emirates of the former Northern Nigeria. Local government administration in the country must be seen in the context of regionalism. The old regions of the East, West and North, as a result of different levels of development traversed different paths to strengthen their systems of local administration.

The local government in the Second Republic was also a centre for party politics. Party politics, therefore, has pervaded local government administration in Nigeria for a long time now. We are, therefore, concerned with examining the dysfunctional activities of political parties and the problems created by party politics in local government administration in Nigeria.

It is in the annals of Nigeria's history that local government councils did not have proper constitutional recognition before 1976 constitutional reforms when General Olusegun Obasanjo, the then head of state, made it so and subsequently imposed this in the 1979 constitution (Adedokun, 2004). The introduction of 1976 reforms brought about uniformity in the administrative structure of the system (Ajayi, 2000). According to

Gboyega (1983), Local government administration in Nigeria experienced fundamental changes in 1976. The 1976 local government reform creates for the first time, a single tier structure of local government council in place of the different structure in the various states. The reforms instituted statutory allocation of revenue from the federation account with the intention of giving local government councils fixed proportions of both the federation account and each state's revenue (Awotokun, 2005).

The implication of the 1976 Local Government Reforms is that it was intended "to stimulate democratic self-government and to encourage initiative and leadership potential" at the local level. Furthermore, it emphasized the fact that "it is only through an effective local government system that human and material resources could be mobilized for local government development." Ajayi (2000) further upheld that in 1991, a major landmark reform was introduced as the system had legislative arm. In addition, the Babangida administration increased the number of local government from 301 in 1976 to 453 in 1989 and 589 in 1991. The Abacha regime also increased the number to 774 local councils that we have today and the administrative structure also underwent some changes. It is important to note that the each successive creation of local governments beginning from 1976 has been done by federal military governments. This shows that the creation and spatial delineation of local government territories, just like state government territories, did not have advantage of democratic processes.

According to the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, section 7(1) of the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria stipulates that "the system of local government by democratically elected local government councils is under constitution guaranteed, and accordingly, the government ensure their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils". Section (4) adds: "The Government of a state shall ensure that every person who is entitled to vote or be voted for at an election to the House of Assembly shall have the right to vote or be voted for at an election to a local government council".

An Overview of Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria

The search for autonomy and the effort of local government to free itself from different forms of control has been one of the major problems facing local government in Nigeria to date. There has been controversy over the years on the issue of autonomy and how it affects local governments in Nigeria. The concept of autonomy and its application has been a subject of debate among scholars (Awortu, 2013). Obikeze and Nnamdi (2010:58) observed that the connotations underpins of the term autonomy are a major source of confusion which scholars of local government administration have severally attempted to clarify. Local government autonomy means the supremacy of byelaws made by a local body within a framework determined by the central and state government. The will of the local government as expressed by the bye-laws is supreme of national guideline. This has to do with the degree of discretionary power assigned to it by a superior instrument of government in terms of functions, finance, administration and political matters.

The struggle for autonomy by the local governments dates back to the colonial period when local government administration was exclusively in the hands of the colonial administration. It was the issue of autonomy and control, which was seen as one of the greatest problems of local administration in Nigeria, which necessitated the various reforms carried out in Nigeria (Aworawo and Akpan, 2003).

It is important to note that there was never a time in Nigeria's postcolonial political history that local governments operated independent of both the state and federal governments, which is the crux of local government autonomy. Nwabueze (1983) opined that autonomy in a federal system means that each government enjoys a separate existence and independence from the control of another government."

The search for this kind of local government system has been a mirage. On this issue, three contending perspectives have emerged. The first group interprets local

government autonomy to mean independence from the interference of state government in the activities of local government. The Second, perceives local government autonomy as the noninterference of the federal government in the activities of local governments, and the third group, maintains that local government autonomy means independence from both state and federal governments interference in the activities of local councils (Akpan and Ekanem, 2013).

In understanding local government autonomy three historical perspectives will be briefly reviewed. The first will be the period from 1950-1983. The second is from 1983-1999 and the third epoch is from mid 1999-to date. In the 1950's local government became a mere appendage of the regional governments. Even though, the 1976 Local government reforms recognize local government as a separate tier of government in the country, local government during this period was left to the whims and caprices of their respective regional governments. Between 1950 and 1952, the regional governments, through their respective Houses of Assembly enacted the local government ordinance, which formerly abolished the hitherto antiquated Native Authority System and subsequently instituted a radically different local government system in the regions.

The period between 1950 and 1983 witnessed the abandonment of the promotion of local autonomy. In the 50's local government recognized local governance as mere appendage of the central government. Though, local government used to exercise limitless powers over their budgets, expenditure and personnel but no sooner than later, the ministry of local government enacted bye-laws to regulate and control their operations. Later, their relative autonomy was further eroded through the ruling party at the centre, which determines the membership composition of the councils. By 1966 when the military took over the reins of power, a more centralized command structure characteristic of the military further worsened the autonomy struggle of local governments until 1976 when the reforms of that year gave local governments a new lease of life. In other words,

between 1960 and 1975, local governments were mere administrative extensions of the central government (Oladoyin, 2008).

It was from the 1976 local government reforms that some dominant issues in local government autonomy could be easily appreciated. These include the setting up of representative councils, determination of population size of local governments, direct allocation of funds to local governments. As a result, local government became very prominent in political discourse in Nigeria since 1976. As noted by Bello-Imam and Uga (2004), two critical factors are responsible for this development. First, the 1976 nation-wide local government reforms unequivocally recognized the tier of government as a distinct level of government with defined boundaries, clearly stated functions and provisions for ensuring adequate human and financial resources and at the same time imposed a nation-wide uniformity for all the units of local government within practical limits. Secondly but relatedly, by deciding to recognize local government as the third tier of government activity in the nation-state and allowing at least theoretically that local government should do precisely what the word government implies, that is governing at the grassroot or local level in the year 1976 became the first time in the history of Nigeria that local government units were

regarded as separate arm of government with constitutional status, power and financial standing irrespective of the fact that the state governments were to ensure their existence and provide for their structure, composition, finance and functions.

The important issues in local government autonomy in Nigeria started to emerge with the 1976 far reaching local government reforms. Before 1976, local administration, rather than local government, could be said to have existed in Nigeria. This is because from the colonial era up to 1975, administration at the local level was an appendage of the Regional and later State governments. This was in spite of some reforms. by the Regional governments at the local level in the 1950s and in post-independence era by the State

governments up to 1975 (Gboyega, 1993; Ola, 1984; Ola and Tonwe, 2005; and Ikelegbe, 2005).

As pointed out earlier, that in the 1976 local government reforms that some dominant issues in local government autonomy could be easily appreciated. These include the setting up of representative councils, determination of population size of local governments, direct allocation of funds to local governments and review of personnel administration. All efforts in 1976 to recognize local government as a tier of government were futile; local government administration is still an appendage of state and federal governments. Despite the constitutional elasticity provided for local government system beginning with the 1979 constitution and subsequent ones that defined functions and sources of funding of the system, local governments have not been able to extricate themselves from the apron string of state and federal governments in Nigeria (Osaghae, 2006). The higher levels of government interfere in their operations in ways that undermine their autonomy. The structure of power that ensures' unitary-federal system and political value of the political elite as shown in state and federal governments interventions in the affairs of local government have gone a long way in diluting the innovations brought about by the entrenchment of local government as a tier of government.

It is important to note that with the exception of the Babangida's administration, all other reforms that have been made in the local government system over the years consistently decreased local government autonomy and increased the interferences of both federal and state governments in the activities of local government. The Babangida administration as earlier stated, introduced direct federal allocation to local government, abolished the Ministry of local government and established executive and legislative arms in local government.

Another area of Local government autonomy has to do with the area of finance. The Constitution empowers the State to scrutinise and approve Local government budgets, and expenditure' through the State House of Assembly, States here exercise arbitrary and undue control over Local government finance through the establishment of the State Local government Joint Account. The issue of State Local government Joint Account has been a thorny issue in Local government State relationship in the Fourth Republic. This situation also brought to the fore the question of Local government autonomy. The experience with many Local government areas was that their states starve them of the statutory grant thus denying them of rendering essential services as required (Asaju, 2010). As asserted by Dalhatu (2006) "the issue of autonomy has to do with the Local government, beyond mere constitutional provision that would be organised as the third tier of government, with power to regulate, to spend and powers to provide services". However, experience and empirical evidences have shown that financial autonomy of local government is non-existent in Nigeria.

The non-independence of the local government as a third tier of government is further buttressed by the fact there are no express constitutional provisions restricting the powers of the State House of Assembly to prescribe the organizational structure of a local government in terms of its functionaries to wit: Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Supervisory Councilors etc. These officers and their offices, qualifications and tenure are not established or prescribed by the Constitution but are created by the law of the State Government.

The 1999 Constitutions of Nigeria poses a major challenge to the autonomy of local government. The double standard of the constitution made it difficult for local governments to operate as an autonomous tier of government (Awortu, 2013). The constitution recognized local government as a third tier of government but gives the state the autonomy to control local government. Section 7 and 8 of the constitution provide that there shall be system of local government by democratically elected

councils which by this constitution guaranteed and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to section 8 of this constitution ensure their existence under a law which is provided for the establishment; structure, composition, finance and functions of the councils. The implication of the above constitutional provisions is that local government in Nigeria cannot exercise the functions assigned to it in section 1 schedule 4 of the constitution until the state House of Assembly had passed a law (Asaju, 2010).

In the views of Obikeze and Nnamdi (2010:61), the politics of local government autonomy were played between the military and civilian government in Nigeria. While the military government at the center favoured devolution of more powers to the local governments, the civilian governments in the states preferred to have all powers devolve only to the state governments."

Local Governments in Nigeria need adequate autonomy that can facilitate their operations and development of the localities. This should emanate from institutionalized democratic process of elections for representative Local Government councils as and when due. This should be in line with what obtains at the State and Federal government levels where elections are timely conducted.

Adequate autonomy should be manifestly accorded Local Governments in other areas such as finance, revenue generation and expenditure, personnel administration and development matters. The literature that has largely, if not indeed entirely, agreed about poached Local Government autonomy will recognize adequate Local Government autonomy when it is granted by higher level governments. Adequate Local Government autonomy will forestall the current alibi that Local Governments make with inadequate autonomy for their diminutive development impact in their areas.

Local Government and Opposition Parties in Nigeria

In a political and truly democratic endeavour, the foundational basis for balance leads to the horizontal separation of powers rather than any vertical formulation of any kind of corruption of this pragmatic ethos. Central to this balance in government is that of the expression of opposition on a parallel political level (Egbewole and Etudaiye, 2010).

Opposition must not be for opposition sake and it must be devoid of violence and must be within the globally accepted standard or best practice. The people in government are not angels; they are human. They are liable to make mistakes and in the same way as party in opposition. The only duty an opposition party need is to provide an alternative view and this must be properly dissected, articulated and effectively communicated to the general public.

It must be realized by both government and opposition that the aspiration to be in government is for one common goal-service to the people. From the dynamics of the happenings in Nigeria, it is clear that apart from a very few individuals in and out of government, it appears that the majority of the political class are "crass opportunists". It has nothing to do with any political party and neither does it have any coloration of ruling or opposition party.

A strong opposition challenges the ruling party. The Opposition and the ruling parties are expected to entertain the values of tolerance, cooperation and compromise (Dahl, 1971). According to LeBas (2003:2), "a strong opposition may be the most effective means of creating checks in hybrid regimes and, therefore, the most important prerequisite for democratic deepening." It is obvious that political parties seek political power directly and they do not pretend to do so. Opposition parties do what they do to improve their chances of replacing the government in power at the next available opportunity.

A credible opposition holds the ruling party accountable. It scrutinises its actions and criticises its policies. It questions the use of state funds and proposes alternatives. In a democratic system, citizens vote for the opposition and hope it keeps its promises. This prevents complacency in the ruling party and forces it to work hard at governing well. A strong opposition challenges the ruling party (Coghill & Hunt, 1998).

An effective opposition is absolutely indispensable to the emergence and consolidation of a stable democratic order. It puts the ruling party on its feet. Where there is no opposition or the opposition is weak, the ruling party is not challenged to initiate programmes and ideas that are beneficial to the masses.

There is no doubt that opposition parties are essential to democracy. They are necessary for building and strengthening democracy. In fact, without the formal existence of opposition parties, true democracy would not exist. In addition, opposition parties bring opportunities for representation and participation.

Opposition party is expected to engage in constant criticisms of the governmental policies which are formulated by the majority, to scrutinize carefully the manner in which these policies are administered, and to keep the possibility of alternative legislative policies and administrative practices constantly in the view of the electorate (Egbewole and Muhtar, 2010).

Opposition parties in Nigerian democracy remained ineffective due to their failure to form coalitions that will give a strong opposition to the ruling party and make them obey the rule of the game for people to enjoy the dividend of democracy. In the views of Jung and Shapiro (1988), a viable opposition facilitates institutional arrangements that enable the performance of a variety of public interest functions.

The result of the various local government elections betrayed the political class. Where the Peoples Democratic Party is the ruling party, all the seats must necessarily be won

by that party. Where the controlling party is the Action Congress, all the Local Government Chairmen invariably are members of the Action Congress. Equally, where the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) is the dominant party, then, the seats at the local governments are in the ANPP's firm control (Egbewole and Etudaiye, 2010).

Conclusion

Local government is a unit of government below the central, regional and state government, established by law to exercise political authority through a representative council within a defined area. It is also a system of public administration at a local level, charged with the responsibility of bringing the people at the grassroots closer to the government.

Over the years there have been a lot of challenges facing local government administration in Nigeria but in recent times the issue of autonomy for local government has increased the tension. There is the need for autonomy to be granted to local governments in Nigeria but the constitutional provision and state governments are vehemently opposing such efforts. This in turn has resulted in several court cases seeking for interpretations of some sections of the constitution. The controversy over local government autonomy is a time bomb waiting to explode (Awortu, 2013).

In Nigeria, the kind of autonomy the federal and state governments devolve the local government via the Constitution is largely determined by the nature and character of the politics of the state. This explains why political elites at the federal and state levels are at war with each other over who controls the affairs of the local government (Akpan and Ekanem, 2013). Even though the local government is commonly referred to as the third-tier of government, it is debatable whether it truly qualifies as third-tier of government. This is because the local government does not have the full compliments of a full three-arm government, like federal and state governments. There is therefore

need for constitutional reforms to provide unique guarantees for the autonomy and powers of the local government.

Autonomy would only be meaningful where each level of government is not constitutionally bound to accept dictation or directive from another. In other words, no level of government must arrogate to itself a superior status or power to control or regulate the official conduct of the other. The continuous domineering and crippling influence of the state governments against the local governments which have now operated only as an appendage of the state government, makes the Local Government in Nigeria system almost a useless instrument of democratization at the grassroots. The Joint account system of the state government under whatever nomenclature it operates has mainly succeeded in entrenching official corruption and lack of accountability in leadership and by extension poor governance.

Local government system can only perform effectively when it has autonomy. State and Federal government should stop wielding undue influence over the local government. It should be given the opportunity to perform independently with minimum control. Joint projects and account between state and local government should be discarded (Babalola and Akinlade, 2013). State should contribute their statutory allocation monthly allocation to the local government rather than milking it to increase the financial base of the state. To ensure effective spending of this allocation, opposition parties should monitor the financial operations of the local governments through constructive criticism of financial dealings and transaction of the ruling party so that the local government fund is not diverted and shared by just a group of people.

Adequate autonomy should be manifestly accorded local governments in other areas such as finance, revenue generation and expenditure, personnel administration and development matters. The literature that has largely, if not indeed entirely, agreed about poached local government autonomy will recognize adequate local government

autonomy when it is granted by higher level governments. Adequate local government autonomy will forestall the current alibi that local governments make with inadequate autonomy for their diminutive development impact in their areas. In this study, local government autonomy for development has been taken as an independent variable, an overriding factor.

The people living at the grassroots would heave a sigh of relieve if the autonomy of the local governments are restored to them. The participation of the local people in their own governance, the harnessing of the local resources and the resultant betterment of the life of the people living in these local governments would be better assured if their autonomy is restored. Moreover if the autonomy of these local governments is restored, democracy would similarly thrive at this level of government (Mbuba, 2014).

If local government autonomy is to be achieved and attain the true third tier status, then the opposition must fearlessly perform its role. The opposition can perform its role fearlessly and effectively, only when it is recognised, accorded rights and enabled to act responsibly. This prompted Quintin (1988), to state that, "Countries cannot be fully free until they have an organised opposition. It is not a long step from the absence of an organized opposition to a complete dictatorship." Based on the strategic importance of opposition in any state, it is therefore conclude that in a true democratic system, the opposition is as important as the government.

REFERENCES

- Adam, L. (2012). How Democracies exit Small Wars: The Role of Opposition Parties in War Termination. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*. 66:(3):381-396
- Adeyeye M. (2005). The Dynamics of administration Reform: An Analysis of Nigerian Local Government. Being Paper Presented at the Mid. Term International Conference organised by IPSA in Association with the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria and Centre for Democratic Governance (AFRIGOV) Abuja.
- Ajayi, K. (2000). Theory and Practice of Local Government. Ado Ekiti, UNAD
- Akpan, F and Ekanem, O. (2013). The Politics of Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria Reloaded. *European Scientific Journal*. 9(35):193-205
- Akpan, N.U. (1972). Epitaphh to Indirect Rule. London: Frank Case.
- Asaju, K. (2010). Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: Politics and Challenges of the 1999 Constitution. *International Journal of Advanced Legal Studies and Governance*. 1(1):98-113.
- Aworawo, D and Akpan, N. (2003). Local Government Administration. In Osuntokun, A; Aworawo, D; Akpan, N and Masa, J.F. (eds). *Issues in Nigerian Government and Politics*. Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication
- Awortu, B.E. (2013). Rethinking Local Government Administration in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Sciences*. 3(4): 248-257
- Awotokun, K. (2005). Local government administration under 1999 constitution in Nigeria. *Journal of social science*, 10(2), 129-134.
- Babalola and Akinlade, (2013). Democratising Local Government Administration: Flaws or Reforms Efforts in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Education and Society*. 4(1):70-75
- Bello-Imam, I.B and Uga, E.O. (2004). Nigerian Local Government as a Third-tier of Governance: Myth or Reality.
- Bello-Imam, I.B and Obadan, M.I. (eds). *Democratic Governance and Development Management in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: 1999-2003*. Ibadan: Centre for Local Government and Rural Development Studies.
- Dahl, R.A. (1971). *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dolo, E. (1996). Opposition parties: Benefits and Challenges in Building Democracy. *The Perspective*, Atlanta, 1-8, 20

- Egbewole, W.O and Etudaiye, M.A. (2010). The Role of Opposition in Nigerian Politics. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*. 4(6):215-220
- Gboyega, A. (1983). Local government reform in Nigeria. in P. Mawhood (ed). *Local government in the Third World*. London: John Wileysons.
- Ilkelegbe, A. (2005). The Local Government System and Grassroots Development in Nigeria: Issues, Problems and Challenges' in A.G. Onokerhoraye and G.E.D. Omuta (eds.). *Perspectives on Development: A Book in Honour of Pius O. Sada*, Benin City: Centre for Population and Environment Development.
- Karpen, U. (1996). The International Experience of Opposition Politics. Lessons for South Africa? in Kotze Hennie (ed), *Parliamentary Dynamics: Understanding political life in the South African Parliament*, Centre for International and Comparative Politics, South Africa.
- Lawal, S. (2000). *Local Government in Nigeria: A Practical Approach*. Ibadan: University Press Limited.
- Mbuba, F.N. (2014). Local Government Autonomy and the Nigeria Legal System: An Appraisal. *Journal of Social Sciences and Public Policy*. 6(1):54-69
- Mohammad, S.O and Chowdhury, A.A. (2012). Quest for an Effective and Efficient Local Government: Local Government in Japan and Policy Implication for Local Government in Bangladesh. *BUP Journal*. 1(1):23-43
- Nnamani, D.O and Anikwe, S.O. (2013). Local Government Administration and Opposition Parties in Nigeria: 1999-2011. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 4(16):17-26
- Nwabueze, B.O. (1982). *The Presidential Constitution or Nigeria*. London: Sweet and Maxwell.
- Nwabueze, B. O. (1982). *A Constitutional History of Nigeria*, Longman.
- Obikeze, O.S.A. & Nnamdi, N. (2010). The 1999 Constitution and Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal. in Obi, E.A. (ed), *Comparative Local Government: An Ecological Approach*. Ontisha: Book Print Publishers.
- Ogunna, A.E.O (1996). *A Handbook on Local Government in Nigeria*. Owerri: Versatile Publishers.
- Okoli, F. (2000). *Theory and Practice of Local Government: Nigerian Perspective*, Enugu: John Jacobs Classic Publishers Ltd
- Ola, R.F. (1984). *Local Administration in Nigeria*. London: Kean Paul International.
- Oladoyin, A.M. (2008). *Readings in Local Government Administration*. Ife. Obafemi Awolowo University Press Limite