



LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS AND GRASSROOT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State (2015-2022). Three research objectives, three research questions and three research hypotheses guided the study. The researchers employed survey research design using questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The sampling technique that was applied in selecting the sample is simple random sampling technique. Simple percentage and chi-square were used for data analysis. It was discovered that State/Local Government Joint Account affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State; the autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State; and ineffective citizen political education affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State. The study concludes that periodic election at the local government level is the key for grassroots political participation in. Based on these findings, it was therefore recommended that the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria should be amended so as to abolish state/local government joint account so as to grant the local government the control of its, finance, and ensure its independence as a third tier of government. Furthermore, local governments should be granted full autonomy to be extricated from the apron of the state governments.

Key Words: Local government elections, Grassroot political participation, Joint account, Independent electoral commission, Citizen political education.

Introduction

Before the British colonial conquest in many communities that made up Nigeria, the communities/people that were later to form modern Nigeria had one form of local administration and the other. Though what existed during this period were not democratically elected but traditional administrative councils specially constituted by each community or ethnic group. This is known as the system of local governance by appointed

chiefs. The situation later metamorphosed into the Native Authority System in the colonial local government administration. The leaders in the earlier local government system as stated above were not democratically elected, but got to the position through different process significance for the community/ethnic group.

Elections into local councils in Nigeria were first organized between 1951-1960 with different modalities in each of the existing three regions (North, West and Eastern). This variation was informed by the varying success of the indirect rule system which by implications informed their agitation for reforms and democratization of the local government system. Hence, the intermittent promulgations of laws led to representative local administration in each region of the country and the attendant variation in the structures of local councils.

These laws were the Eastern Region Local Government Ordinance of 1950, Western Region Local Government law of 1952, and the Northern Region Native Authority law of 1954. These laws introduced a three-tier form of popularly elected Councils. The first consists of County Council, District Council and Local Councils in the Eastern Region, the second brought about the British system of Local Government-Divisional Council, District Council and Local Council in the Western Region and the thirds, the Chiefs-in-Council and Chiefs-and-Council native authorities in the Northern Region.

The basic repositioning of the Nigeria local government took effect in 1976 through the 1976 local government reform which made the local government a third tier. One of the major highlights of the reforms was its provision for a uniform elective local government council throughout the country.

In line with this provision, council polls for the first time were held across the country in December 1976 (Olaniyi 2017). Unfortunately, the progress made in the local government administration with the 1976 Reforms was virtually scuttled in the Second Republic (1979-1983). Okechukwu and Obinna (2013) described the Second Republic as a turbulent period in the history of local government administration. Not only was there a proliferation of local governments throughout the country, most of which was created for selfish political interest, many local councils were also dissolved on flimsy excuses (especially those under the control of an opposition party) and their replacement with Management Committee made up of party minions. More so, during the Second Republic, there was no election into local councils throughout the country. After the second republic, the Babangida administration made a significant improvement in the local government election to improve political participation. Babangida's government was credited for organizing the December 1987 Local Government Election which was conducted on a non-party basis.

The regime equally recorded the separation of powers and functions in the administration of local government with the adoption of the 1989 Constitution and the ensuing 1990 local government election. Furthermore, the Abacha government also organized and conducted the March 1996 and 1997 local government council elections, even though these elections were said to have been manipulated for Abacha's self-succession transitional programme, as candidates had to identify with Abacha and his parties to be cleared for or to win elections

(Ovwasa 2014; Oddey 2013). Following the death of Abacha, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, conducted the December 1998 Local government election as a preparatory to democratic rule on multi-party basis. The expectation was that a democratic local government system has come to stay, one that is administered by a genuinely elected council without interference from the higher level(s) of government. Unfortunately, not much has been achieved since then.

The yawning gap between the expectation and reality arises from the provisions of the 1999 Constitution itself. This constitutional provision implies that the conduct of Local government election is at the discretion of the State Governor who will have to constitute and appoints SIEC members before an election could hold. In short, since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria, local government administration has witness more of Caretakers Committee leadership than elected officials not only in Imo State, but almost all states in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

With the enthronement of democratic rule in Nigeria since 1999, credible local government elections in Nigeria in general and Imo State in particular are illusory. Such illusion is not unconnected with the deliberate refusal of the Imo State government and other state governments to keep out of the councils' elections and provide wide latitude of freedom for an unbiased umpire to manage the electioneering process. What usually takes place during LGA elections in Imo State and other LGAs in Nigeria amounts to compilation and announcement of false election results, and subsequent swearing-in of (un)elected chairmen and councilors. Put more frankly, there is always a predictable situational sweeping of polls by the ruling parties in states. Consequently, rather than being a viable instrument of grassroots political participation and socialization, local government has been reduced to an avenue for unjust political mobilization and support to the state government. Again, Section 3, part II of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution as amended, provides for the establishment of the State Independent Electoral Commission (SIEC) to organize and conduct elections to local government councils within the state.

This provision implies that the composition of the SIECs is at the whims and caprices of the States governors who most time reluctant to constitute SIEC. Practically speaking, there is no state in Nigeria where the State Independent Electoral Commission conducted local government election and the ruling party in the state did not sweep the polls to at least 70 percent. Examples of such zero-sum syndrome in local government election are not farfetched. This was the case in both 2010 and 2018 local government elections in Imo State. Based on the above, this study wants to ascertain the extent State/Local Government Joint Account, autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission, and citizens political education affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated.

1. To what extent does State/Local Government Joint Account affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State?
2. To what extent does the autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State?
3. To what extent does ineffective citizen political education affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State?

Research Hypotheses

Based on the research questions and objectives of the study, the following hypotheses guided the study.

H_{o1}: State/Local Government Joint Account does not affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State.

H_{i1}: State/Local Government Joint Account affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State.

H_{o2}: The autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission does not affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State.

H_{i2}: The autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State.

H_{o3}: Ineffective citizen political education does not affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State.

H_{i3}: Ineffective citizen political education affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State.

Conceptual Review

Local Government

According to Ojofeitimi (2000), the word “local” connotes that councils are meant for small communities and the word “government” means that they have certain attributes of a government. It refers to the self-government of the local community for the local community by its elected local inhabitants. In the same vein, the International Union of Local Government Authorities (cited in Olaniyi 2017:4) defines local government as the level of government with constitutionality defined rights and duties to regulate and manage public affairs which are constitutionally defined for the exclusive interest of the local population. These rights and duties shall be exercised by individuals that are freely elected or appointed with the full participation of the elected body. The 1976 Nigerian Local Government Reform aptly captures what should be of any local government. According to the “Guidelines”:

Local government is government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers within areas defined. These powers should give the council substantial control over its local affairs as well

as staffing and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and to determine and implement projects that complement the activities of the state and federal government in their areas. They are also to ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized (Reform Guidelines 1976 cited in Nwanna 2014:181).

Njoku (2009) sees local government as a tier/level of government generally applied to the administrative unit of small local areas into which a country is usually split. It is because of its proximity to local people that local governments are usually given such functions/powers that are of special concern to these areas so as to make them realizable within the shortest possible time. Therefore local government in Nigeria is not only government in theory; it performs all those operational functions similar to those of higher tier governments that makes it consummate its third tier status as a full-fledged government as conferred in the constitution of the federal government of Nigeria. Looking at Local Government from its objectives, we can defined it as a system of Local Administration under which Local communities and towns are organized to maintain law and order, and provide limited range of social services and public amenities and encourage co-operation and participation of the inhabitants in joint endeavours towards the improvement of their condition of living.

Election

Elections in the words of Diamond (2002:353) “are the Litmus test of a democratic political system.” This is such that to define liberal democracy in its essence is to underline the centrality of elections. Odojin (2005:96) corroborated this view when he argued that election is considered to be a critical element of modern representative government, closely linked to the growth and development of democratic political order and as the most important singular indicator of the presence of democracy. He conceptualized it as the manner of choices agreed upon by a political community that empowers its members to select one or few out of many competitors to occupy one or some positions of authority, as the case may be. To guarantee a certain degree of fairness and justice to all concerned, the manner of choice usually involves rules and regulations. Elections are the principal mechanism by which citizens hold government accountable both retrospectively for their policies and more generally for how they govern.

According to Gwinn and Norton (1992), election is the formal process of selecting a person for public office or accepting a political position by voting. Here, an election is one of the means by which a society may organize itself and make specific formal decisions, adding that where voting is free, it acts simultaneously as a system for making certain decisions regarding the power relation in a society, and a method for seeking political obedience with a

minimum of sacrifice of the individual's freedom. The essence of election is freedom of choice.

Grassroot Political Participation

According to Ubah, Nwaki, Nwachukwu and Obijuru (2023), grassroot political participation is all about community involvement in democratic process. It is the democratic practices in the local communities at the local government or grassroot levels. If the people in the rural areas are fully allowed to participate actively in democracy; through political mobilization, election campaign, election contest, voting and political involvement, the country will achieve high level of development and democratic sustainability. That is why Okororie (2021) opined that grassroot politics is the process of political and electoral participation by people at the grassroot level. It is all about making the people at the community and village level to effectively take part in politics by being members of political parties, taking part in election and voting, contesting for political position and involving in other aspects of politics that can bring development to the community. Generally, Political participation is the involvement of the citizens in the political system.

Eakin cited in Adelekan (2020) described political participation as the process through which the individual plays a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take part in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. According to Osundu (2019) political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on the way in which individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly. The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities and other civic engagements.

Political participation is one of the fundamental requirements of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan (2020) emphasized that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involves one's life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Awolowo and Aluko, 2020). The extent to which people participate in the political system differ from person to person.

State/Local Government Joint Account and Local Government Election in Nigeria

The first constitution in Nigeria to recognize State/Local Government Joint Account was the 1979 constitution. This account system was abrogated in 1989 by the then Military Head of State – Gen Ibrahim Babangida because of the obvious mismanagement of the system by various state governments in Nigeria. The Joint account found its way back in 1999 constitution. The provisions are found in section 162, subsection 5 and section 162,

subsection 6 respectively. According to Agu (2017), in 1999, Abdulsalami Abubakar came into power and drafted the joint account into the constitution of 1999. The study revealed that this arrangement has been vulnerable to several abuses by state governments. In the first instance, since the accounts were established under the control of the state government, Local Government Councils lost a degree of autonomy and control over their financial management. Some state governments had enacted laws that give them power to make spurious deductions from Joint Account Allocation Commission at the detriment of the Local Government Councils (Igbuzor, 2011).

According to Bello (2022), it is because of the joint account system that made the state governments to always pay less attention to local government elections and prefer the used of caretaker committee system. In view of Sanni (2012), the State Joint Local Government Account has encouraged the state governments to have great interest in the finances of the local government. Here, they believe that if they conduct credible local government election periodically, they may not have the direct control of the local government. For Kabiru (2015), the Nigerian constitution provides for the provision of The State Joint Local Government Account thereby given more power to the state government to control the local government; hence denying the local government periodic election. Although the constitution enjoined states to pay 10 percent of the statutory revenues to Local Government Councils (LGCs), in Nigeria almost no states honored the provision. Additionally, statutory allocations from the “Federation Account” to LGCs, paid into State Joint Local Government Account’ were often diverted by some state Governments.

The Autonomy of State Independent Electoral Commission and Credible Local Government Elections

For local government elections to be free, fair, acceptable and credible; there is need for an umpire and unbiased one for that matter. It is expected that the State independent electoral commission should be autonomy so as to conduct credible local government elections. Joseph Stalin (cited in Odoziobodo, 2015) posits “those who cast the votes decide nothing; those who count the votes decide everything.” It is only when the right people are in a right institutional framework that democracy could be said to be consolidated through credible elections in the local government level. According to Ochienta (2013), the State independent electoral commission has the responsibility to conduct local government elections in States. If there must be credible election, the umpire and its staff must adhere to rules, principles and ethics guiding their functions.

In this case, they must be truly unbiased, neutral and show high level of credibility throughout the electoral process. However, the question here is to what extent do state election umpire enjoy autonomy to conduct credible elections. For Ndimaeme (2018), state electoral commissions do not enjoy any autonomy to perform their functions. They are appointed, paid, and directed by the state governments; and this is the reason why the ruling parties in most cases win regularly 100% or nearly 100% in almost every local government election where it’s organized.

Citizen Political Education and Local Government Elections

There is need for improved citizens' education so as to encourage political participation. According to Umeh and Okereke (2020), the rate of electoral participation should be more than average and one imbued with high or appreciable level of voter turnout during elections. This, in itself, is also an indication of the volume of political enlightenment and the desire of the people to remain part of the governing process and the benefits thereto. A close observation of democratic practice in Nigeria shows that the rate of electoral participation though increased in 2023, but will reduce because of lack of election credibility. High level of political education is needed to ensure political participation by the electorate and reduce the problem of political apathy. That is why Ejue and Ekanem (2011) opine that the electorates are the major stakeholders in the electoral process. According to Nwanna (2014), there is need to continue to educate the public, especially the people in the local government on the need to take active part in politics.

This is so because "voting is a vital mechanism of election and is the fundamental civic right and this right is granted through the principle of Universal Adult Suffrage". If Nigeria must achieve electoral credibility at the local government level, there is great need for citizenship education on the need to actively participate in election. In their words, Ejue and Ekanem (2011) stated that:

...The importance of citizenship education as it relates to credible elections at local government level can be seen in the fact that democracies require active, informed and responsible citizens, that is, citizens who are willing and able to take responsibility for themselves and their communities and contribute to the political process.

Empirical Studies

Some of the empirical studies were summarized thus:

Oluwasuji and Okajare (2021) focused on participatory democracy, local government elections and the politics of the states ruling parties in Nigeria, interrogates the role of States ruling party in local government elections in Nigeria with particular reference to the 2017 and 2019 local government elections in Ekiti State. It relied on both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary data were obtained through a questionnaire and secondary data were obtained from textbooks, related journal articles, and newsprints. The paper adopted elite theory to explain States' dominance and 'illegitimate' control of the local government in Nigeria. It was revealed among others, that local governments elections in Nigeria has always been under the stranglehold of States governors and their political parties who designed and determined the contour of the elections as well as the operations of the electoral umpire.

Umeh and Okereke (2020) studied political parties and electoral participation in Nigeria: An Empirical Study of the 2019 general elections in Okigwe Political Zone of Imo State. The objectives being to determine the extent to which Political Parties discourage electoral

participation; perpetrate fear of insecurity; practice internal democracy; and engage in civic education, using the 2019 general election as a study case. Survey research design was adopted for the study. A total sample size of four hundred (400) persons were randomly selected out of eight hundred and eighty one thousand, eight hundred and ninety (881,890) eligible registered voters in Okigwe political Zone. The research instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire for the registered voters titled, (RVSQ) and complemented with interviews. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentages and frequencies. The study was anchored on the structural functional theory. It was found that low electoral participation was due to the fact that political parties perpetrated fear of insecurity; did not engage in sufficient practice of internal democracy, as well as civic education.

Bello (2022) aimed at investigating the management and challenges of State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) and the implications of these for effective service delivery in Kaduna and Gombe States. Three hypotheses were formulated to serve as a guide to the study. Data for the study were generated from both the primary and secondary sources and their contents were analyzed using chi-square, tables, and percentages. Responses from interview were used for further analysis in the presentation of data. The findings of this research are that excessive control especially through the (SJLGA,) and paucity of funds occasioned by improper management of the SJLGA has combined to hamstring the efficient service delivery ability of the understudied local governments in Kaduna and Gombe States. The first factor which is excessive control through the (SJLGA) contributed the most to the dismal state of affairs in the understudied local governments. Consequently, it is recommended that the provisions of the State Joint Local Government Account be reviewed in the on-going 1999 Constitution review in order to salvage the local governments' deplorable financial situation being brought about by the improper management of this Joint Account.

Gap in Literature

The research gap exists on the subject matter, content of the work, and geographical location. On the issue of the subject matter, it could be seen that none of the past studies covered both dependent and independent variables of this work. Some covered the dependent variable, and others focused on the independent variables.

Theoretical Framework

One of the most dominant features of social science scholarship is the adoption, discussion, analysis, and even understanding of concepts from a theoretical point of view or orientation. This work is anchored on the elite theory. A pioneering figure that set out a basic framework of elite theory was Wright Mill in his *Power Elite*. Its modern usage and popularity lied most clearly in the writings of Vilfredo Pareto (1935) *The Mind and Society*, Gaetano Mosca (1939) *The Ruling Class*, and Robert Michels (1961) *Iron Law of Oligarchy*. The elite theory is an explanation of the role of leadership in governance as it affects decision making including all socio-economic and political matters. The central assumption of the theory is that every

society; including democratic societies are ruled by a small minority group who mostly occupy formal institutions of government and by implication are determining factors in governance and decision-making processes. According to Mosca (1939), every society is divided into classes: the class which rules and the class which is ruled. He called the former the minority and the latter the majority.

The former contains a few numbers of people and possesses all political power and privileges, whereas, the latter consists of a large number of people and is subjected to the rule of the former. Elite stratum comprises of those that hold formal and legal authoritative power and those that do not but are rather behind the scene, teleguiding and manipulating overt political and policy actions. Thus, Pareto's major contribution to the development of the elite theory was his classification and description of the nature of the ruling class (elite). According to him, there are various strata in the elite stratum. These include: (a) the governing elites that consist of the individuals (such as former rulers, top leaders of political parties) who directly or indirectly wield considerable influence and command in government (b) the political elites (those that occupy formal political institutions) that effectively and particularly exercise political power (c) non-governing elites (such as the owner of big businesses and corporations) that consist the rest of the stratum (Pareto, 1968). The second (the political elites) who in the context of this study includes the state governors and their agents such as the commissioners are at heart of our discussion here. Local government affairs in Nigeria are within the foregoing line of thoughts controlled by the political elites who seize the opportunity of their political hegemony in the states to control and determine local government affairs including its composition, structure, running, and election of the council members for their selfish interests.

Elite theory explicates how political elites recruit themselves not just in national politics but also in local government politics. Local government elections are conducted under the tutelage of the state governors who recruit their clients and legitimize them through for election. Here, when the local government election is conducted, is used by the state governors (elites) to compensate their supporters and party men. When the election is not conducted at the local government levels, they appoint caretaker committee and use it for same purpose as stated above. Therefore, it is because of the behaviour of the elites (the state governors) which discourage people at grassroots level to effectively participate in local government elections. The people feel that local government elections (where it take place) is just a formality for the elite (led by the governor) to enthrone his or her candidate(s) in position of local government chairmen and counselors. A situation where local government elections are not conducted periodically, where the elites always instill there preferred candidates, where the election if conducted is not always credible because of lack of autonomy of the SIEC calls for concern.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers employed survey research design.

Population of the Study

The population of this study covers the entire 15,000 stakeholders (Elders council, women leaders, youths leaders) in different autonomous communities in Orlu LGA, Ideato North LGA, Owerri North LGA, Aboh Mbaise LGA, Okigwe LGA, and Ishiala Mbano LGA all in Imo State (ie, two LGAs from each zones of the state). The stakeholders were used because they have information on local government elections and political participation.

Sample Size

The sample size is mathematically derived using the Taro Yamane’s formula as thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N = population of the study

e = Margin of tolerance error (5% or 0.05)

$$n = \frac{15000}{1+15000(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{15000}{15000 \times 0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{15000}{50.0025}$$

$$= 299.9$$

Sample size = 300

Research Instrument

The major instrument used here is the questionnaire.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and chi-square.

Data Analysis

Out of 300 copies of the questionnaire distributed, only 285 copies were returned and used.

Section B: The Subject Matter

Question 1: The need to control the finances of the LGA makes the state government to avoid local government elections.

Table 1: Responses on if the need to control the finances of the LGA makes the state government to avoid local government elections.

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agreed	200	70.2
Disagreed	85	29.8
Total	285	100

Source: survey data 2023

From the above table, 70.2% of the respondents agreed while 29.8% of the respondents disagreed.

Question 2: The benefits state governments derived from State/Local Government Joint Account make them to neglect local government elections and grassroots political participation.

Table 2: Responses on if the benefits state governments derived from State/ Local Government Joint Account make them to neglect local government elections and grassroots political participation.

<i>Options</i>	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<i>Agreed</i>	190	66.7
<i>Disagreed</i>	95	33.3
Total	285	100

Source: survey data 2023

From the result in table 2, it could be seen that State/ Local Government Joint Account make them to neglect local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State, as 66.7% of the respondents agreed while 33.3% disagreed.

Question 3: Lack of local government autonomy hinders the conduct of local government elections and political participation.

Table 3: Responses on if lack of local government autonomy hinders the conduct of local government elections and political participation.

<i>Options</i>	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<i>Agreed</i>	180	63.2
<i>Disagreed</i>	105	36.8
Total	285	100

Source: survey data 2023

The table above showed that 63.2% of the respondents while 36.8% disagreed.

Question 4: Encouraging local government autonomy will encourage political participation through periodic elections.

Table 4: Responses on if encouraging local government autonomy will encourage political participation through periodic elections.

<i>Options</i>	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<i>Agreed</i>	175	61.4
<i>Disagreed</i>	110	38.6
Total	285	100

Source: survey data 2023

The table above showed that 61.4% of the 170 respondents agreed while 38.6% of the respondents disagreed.

Question 5: Poor citizenship education hinders grassroots involvement in politics.

Table 5: Responses on if poor citizenship education hinders grassroots involvement in politics.

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<i>Agreed</i>	197	69.1
<i>Disagreed</i>	88	30.9
Total	285	100

Source: survey data 2023

From the above table, 69.1% of the respondents agreed while 30.9% of the respondents disagreed.

Question 6: High level of political apathy is based ineffective citizen political orientation

Table 6: Responses on if high level of political apathy is based ineffective citizen political orientation

Options	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<i>Agreed</i>	185	64.9
<i>Disagreed</i>	100	35.1
Total	285	100

Source: survey data 2023

From the above table, 64.9% of the respondents agreed while 35.1% disagreed on the view.

Test of Hypotheses

H01: State/Local Government Joint Account does not affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Question 1 and 2 of the questionnaire items are relevant for the hypothesis one.

Table 7: Observed frequency for hypothesis one.

Options	No. of Respondents		Percentage (%)
<i>Agreed</i>	200	190	390
<i>Disagreed</i>	85	95	180
Total	285	285	570

Source: Based on data in table 1 and 2

$$\sum = \frac{\text{row total} \times \text{column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$$

$$E_{1,1} = \frac{390 \times 285}{570} = 195$$

$$E_{1,2} = \frac{390 \times 285}{570} = 195$$

$$E_{2,1} = \frac{180 \times 285}{570} = 90$$

$$E_{2,2} = \frac{180 \times 285}{570} = 90$$

Table 8: Computation of chi-square (χ^2) $\sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$

Observed Frequency (O_i)	Expected Frequency (E_i)	$O_i - E_i$	$(O_i - E_i)^2$	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
200	195	5	25	0.1282
190	195	-5	25	0.1282
85	90	-5	25	0.2778
95	90	5	25	0.2778
570				0.812

χ^2 calculated = 0.812

At 5% level of significance, degree of freedom (df) is (row - 1) x (column - 1), which is (2 - 1) x (2 - 1) = 1

χ^2 tabulated at 5% level of significance, degree of freedom 1 = 3.84

Decision Rule

Since χ^2 calculated is greater than χ^2 tabulated that is $812 > 3.84$, we will reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, and hence conclude that State/Local Government Joint Account affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Ho2: The autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission does not affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Question 3 and 4 of the questionnaire items are relevant for the hypothesis two.

Table 9: Observed frequency for hypothesis two.

Options	No. of Respondents		Percentage (%)
Agreed	180	175	355
Disagreed	105	110	215
Total	285	285	570

Source: Based on data in table 3 and 4

$$\sum = \frac{\text{row total} \times \text{column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$$

$$E_{1,1} = \frac{355 \times 285}{570} = 177.5$$

$$E_{1,2} = \frac{355 \times 285}{570} = 177.5$$

$$E_{2,1} = \frac{215 \times 285}{570} = 107.5$$

$$E_{2,2} = \frac{215 \times 285}{570} = 107.5$$

Table 10: Computation of chi-square (χ^2) $\sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$

Observed Frequency (O_i)	Expected Frequency (E_i)	$O_i - E_i$	$(O_i - E_i)^2$	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
180	177.5	2.5	6.25	0.0352
175	177.5	-2.5	6.25	0.0352
105	107.5	-2.5	6.25	0.0581
110	107.5	2.5	6.25	0.0581
570				0.1866

χ^2 calculated = 0.1866

χ^2 tabulated at 5% level of significance, degree of freedom 1 = 3.84

Decision Rule

Since χ^2 calculated is greater than χ^2 tabulated that is $1866 > 3.84$, we will reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, and hence conclude that the autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Ho3: Ineffective citizen political education does not affect credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Question 5 and 6 of the questionnaire items are relevant for the hypothesis three.

Table 11: Observed frequency for hypothesis three.

Options	No. of Respondents		Percentage (%)
Agreed	197	185	382
Disagreed	88	100	188
Total	285	285	570

Source: Based on data in table 5 and 6

$$\Sigma = \frac{\text{row total} \times \text{column total}}{\text{Grand total}}$$

$$E_{1,1} = \frac{382 \times 285}{570} = 191$$

$$E_{1,2} = \frac{382 \times 285}{570} = 191$$

$$E_{2,1} = \frac{188 \times 285}{570} = 94$$

$$E_{2,2} = \frac{188 \times 285}{570} = 94$$

Table 12: Computation of chi-square (χ^2) $\sum \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$

Observed Frequency (O_i)	Expected Frequency (E_i)	$O_i - E_i$	$(O_i - E_i)^2$	$\frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i}$
197	191	6	36	0.1885
185	191	-6	36	0.1885
88	94	-6	36	0.3830
100	94	6	36	0.3830
570				1.1430

χ^2 calculated = 1.1430

At 5% level of significance, degree of freedom (df) is (row - 1) x (column - 1), which is (2 - 1) x (2 - 1) = 1

χ^2 tabulated at 5% level of significance, degree of freedom 1 = 3.84

Decision Rule

Since χ^2 calculated is greater than χ^2 tabulated that is 1.1430 > 3.84, we will reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, and hence conclude that ineffective citizen political education affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Orlu LGA, Imo State.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the hypothesis one, it could be seen that State/Local Government Joint Account affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State. Empirically speaking, the Imo State government only conducted local government elections in 2014 and 2018. The elected chairmen and counselor of 2018 left office in 2021, and since then there has not been any local government election again (Imo Patriot, 2022). Even when the local government elections are conducted, it's more of political appointments as the state governments use the opportunity to give positions to his preferred people. Olaniyi (2017); argued that most state governors in Nigeria do not conduct local government elections because of the benefits they derived from state local government joint account.

In line with the hypothesis two, it could be seen that the autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission affects credible local government elections and grassroots political

participation in Imo State. The above result is in line with result of the work of Oguonu (2014) who stated that lack of local government elections and political participation can be achieved through local government autonomy. Imo today (2018) reports that the entire local government elected executive are under control of the governor, since it was the governor who indirectly selected them through appointed elections. This is true because it's only the loyal people who support the governor win the council elections as chairmen, vice chairmen and counselors.

From the hypothesis three, it could be seen that ineffective citizen political education affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State. This affirms the results of the researches by Adelekan (2020) and Osundu (2019) which indicated that the level of citizen orientation for local government political participation is poor. Trump magazine (2018) reported poor voters' turnout for local government election in Imo State. According to Okororie (2021), regular poor voters turnout in local government election is based on much state government control and lack of credible elections.

Conclusion

It was discovered that State/Local Government Joint Account affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State; the autonomy of Imo State independent electoral commission affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State; and ineffective citizen political education affects credible local government elections and grassroots political participation in Imo State. Based on these findings, the study concludes that periodic election at the local government level is the key for grassroots political participation in Imo State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria should be amended so as to abolish state/local government joint account so as to grant the local government the control of its, finance, and ensure its independence as a third tier of government.
2. State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) should be scrapped. In its place, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be constitutionally empowered to conduct local government elections preferably at the time when both federal and state elections are conducted. This is because as long as the SIECs continue to be in charge of council elections; it will continue to be an instrument in the hands of the state governor to manipulate the electoral processes. More importantly, this will bring great grassroots political participation at the local government level.
3. Local governments should be granted full autonomy to be extricated from the apron of the state governments. By implication, this will put an end to the willful dissolutions of elected local government councils by the governors and their situational replacement with caretaker committees.

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