

RESEARCH

Local government election and democracy: evidence from Enugu State, Nigeria

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In the history of mankind, democracy is presumably the best among all the systems of government. Where it is practiced well, election is the means of determining the will of the people regarding their choice of political leaders. However, the local government elections conducted in Nigeria lacked those principles required in a democratic setting. This paper examines the extent to which democratic principles were flouted in local government elections in Nigeria with particular reference to local government elections conducted in Enugu State in 2022. The study adopted the elite theory. Data for the study were drawn from participant observation and review of authentic secondary sources. The study identified that the 2022 local government elections were neither fair, credible, nor transparent because of political influence which manipulated both the electoral process and the conduct of election and thereby denying the eligible voters the opportunity of choosing their preferred candidate. The study concluded that local government elections conducted in Enugu State in 2022 look like a mockery of election in a democratic setting. The study recommended among others that 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria should be amended to grant full autonomy to local governments so as to loosen them from the control of the State governments, and also that the State Independent Electoral Commission be scrapped and replaced with Independent National Electoral Commission for the purpose of conducting local government elections in Nigeria.

Keywords: elite theory, election, democracy, local government, Nigeria

Introduction

A key feature of modern democracies is Local elections. Elections help to establish, nurture, and sustain democracy and democratic political culture (1). The relevance of elections to democratic process is seen in the fact that it provides citizens with the power to freely participate in choosing their leaders. It also confers legitimacy on those responsible for the exercise of executive and legislative powers in the polity. Election, therefore, not only constitutes

the major process for installing governments, but is also an avenue for holding public officials accountable for their actions and keeping them responsive to the peoples' needs and interests in democracy. In essence, for an election to live up to its democratic essence and merits, it must satisfy the requirements of regularity, competition, openness, transparency, fairness, and credibility (2). It is within these requirements that election can be adjudged to be democratic.

Local governments, on the other hand, are viable instruments of grassroots political participation and

socialization. They are generally (in principle) viable instruments in the democratization of modern governments, while elections are means of ensuring regular changes of government. Nigeria currently has three tiers of government; Federal, State, and local. Each of these levels of government has its own allotted powers and functions. It also has its own peculiar problem that has rendered it inefficient. Constitutionally, it is also through election that we choose leaders to fill the executive and legislative positions in all the three tiers of government in Nigeria. This work focuses on the third tier of government in Nigeria, that is the local government. People that govern local governments in Nigeria are elected by the people. The elected officials of local government are responsible and accountable to the people over which they govern (3). However, since the restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, most if not all the local government elections conducted by the States across the federation have been relegated to the background whereby its process, conduct, and outcome are often at the mercy of the States' ruling parties and their governors.

The conduct of the local government elections has started to throw up a couple of questions: how were local government elections in Nigeria? and how were local government elections in Enugu State conducted in 2022; and to critically examine the roles State governors played in the local government elections in Enugu State.

The general objective of the study was to examine local government elections in Nigeria and find out whether elections are conducted in line with the democratic principles. The specific objectives of the study were to: examine the local government elections in Nigeria, discuss how local government elections were conducted in Enugu State in 2022, and to critically examine the roles the State governor played in the local government elections in Enugu State.

Literature review

Local government

The concept "local government" has been subjected to myriad of definitions by various scholars and practitioners. The most important and the most referenced period in the evolution and development of local government system in Nigeria was the 1976 local government reforms. It was upon this reform that others were built. The guidelines for the implementation of 1976 local government reforms in Nigeria refer to local government as government at the local level exercised through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within. This definition points to the fact that local government is grassroot government that is based on democratically elected leaders. In the same vein, (Adeyemi, 2013) [cited in Offiah and Okoroafor (4):p. 103]

affirm that local government in the Nigerian context is a third tier of governance, protected by the constitution, which comprises of democratically elected representatives whose purpose is to provide basic services to the people at the grassroots. Olaniyi [(5):4] defines local government as the level of government with constitutionality defined right and duties to regulate and manage public affairs that 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. From these definitions, the basic characteristics of local government are identified as follows (a) Local government is government of the people by the people. (b) It has certain power over a particular geographical area. (c) People that govern local governments are elected by the people. (d) The elected officials of local government are responsible and accountable to the people they govern. From this, it is clear that the concept of local government involves a commitment to the idea of democratic participation in the governing process of the country at the grassroots level.

Green [cited in Nwanna (1): p. 181] opined that local government is an essential instrument of national or state government for performance of certain functions that can best be administered locally on the intimate knowledge of the needs, conditions, and peculiarities of the areas concerned. Local governments perform some functions, which include among others training future leaders, educate local people about policies, maintenance services, and provision of environmental sanitation and sewage disposal (6). It is our expectations that local government in Nigeria perform these and other related functions not mentioned here, but unfortunately, the local government system especially under this fourth republic suffers the greatest assault since the reform of the 1976, and as a result they became redundant and less effective. Councils are cut off from the people and their impacts are hardly felt by the local people.

Election

There is no limit placed on the definition and meaning of the concept "election." The use of elections in the modern era dates back to the emergence of representative government in Europe and North America around the 17th century. Ogunna (7) defined election as a process in which the citizens vote for their candidates who would serve as their representatives in governance. Aluko (8) sees it as a means or mechanisms by which individuals or groups are chosen or elected through votes to occupy certain given positions. Elections according to Nwanna (1) refers to formal processes by which voters make their political choices on public issues or candidates for public offices. From these definitions, one could easily conclude that election is a process that allows

people to freely choose or select those who will lead them. In whichever way, the concept of election is defined; the consensus among scholars is that election constitutes the crux of a democratic system.

Most countries hold elections in the formal sense, and elections are usually considered to be competitive. Elections are believed to serve various functions among which are: (1) Contributing to democratic governance, by enabling voters to select their leaders and hold them accountable for their performance in office. (2) Being a forum where public issues are discussed and people express their opinion. (3) Providing political education for citizens (4) Reinforcing the stability and legitimacy of the political community and helping to facilitate social and political integration (9).

Elections in Nigeria are forms of choosing representatives to the federal, State, and local governments. On the federal level, Nigerians elect their president and national assembly members. On the State level, they elect their governors and members of State assembly. At the local government level, they elect their chairmen and local government councilors.

Democracy

Greek democracy is characterized as the domination of the people, or the public. The primary characteristic of a democratic constitution is that the majority governs, with the minority exercising control and applying pressure to the majority. While the minority accepts the political system and operates within its bounds, the majority defends the rights of the minority (10, 11). In a specific nation-state, the first form of democracy emerged in ancient Athens between 500 and 321 B.C. and followed the model of direct democracy. But with the election of representatives, representative democracy has supplanted this framework.

Citizens' direct participation in the assemblies, which serve as the legislative branch of government, was a defining characteristic of the earliest democratic model that was prevalent in ancient Athens. At the time, this was the most effective way to rule. In addition to the assemblies, a variety of elective techniques, including instant elections, voting, draws, and selection, were employed for the public postulates (12). However, representative democracy has supplanted direct democracy in contemporary politics and administrations. Under this system, democratically elected representatives from various parties are chosen through regular national elections to make decisions that affect the entire nation rather than the general public. The present type of political parties is a product of the Great Britain in the 18th century. The existence and function of political parties securing the equity of opportunity is one of the most fundamental features of the pluralist democracy (13).

Democracy is the system of government that concerns political decision in which individuals acquire the power

to decide through competitive struggle for the people's vote (14). Democracy can also be defined as a system of government that guarantees active participation of the people in governance and in decision-making processes in order to meet their peculiar needs [(Agagu, 1997) cited in Offiah and Okoroafor (4)]. It then means that political offices are filled through regular, free and fair election among political parties in a competitive manner in which the winner assumes office freely.

Democracy is characterized by three key qualities namely: non-violence, political participation, and control and political equality (15). These qualities differentiate democracy from other forms of governments that are dictatorial and do not adequately put into consideration the wishes and desires of the people in whatever sphere, be it in the choice of credible candidate that will represent them in government or in overall decision-making. The domineering influence of oppression and exploitation cannot succeed in a well-practiced democratic system of government. Democracy can be practiced at any level of government, be it Federal, State, and local governments.

When we talk about democracy at the local government level, it means shifting democratic traditions to the periphery level through people's participation in determining who is to govern (16). Election is therefore the major process for installing democracy at the local government. For election to live up to its democratic essence and merit, it must satisfy the requirements of regularity, competition, openness, transparency, fairness, and credibility.

Democratic principles

The following are some democratic principles put together by Universal Declaration on democracy adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 161st session in Cairo on 16 September 1997.

1. A universally acknowledged ideal and objective, democracy is founded on shared values that all members of the global community share, regardless of cultural, political, social, or economic differences. Thus, exercising one's basic civic right in a way that upholds freedom, equality, responsibility, and due respect for differing opinions while also serving the interests of the political system is essential.
2. As an ideal, democracy primarily seeks to uphold and advance the individual's dignity and fundamental rights, to accomplish social justice, to support the community's social and economic development, to fortify social cohesion, to improve national tranquility, and to establish an environment that is conducive to world peace. Democracy is the best type of government for accomplishing these goals since it is the only one with the ability for self-correction.

3. A democracy guarantees that the procedures by which power is obtained, used, and relinquished permit free political competition and are the outcome of the public's open, unrestricted, and non-discriminatory participation, exercised in conformity with the rule of law, in letter and spirit.
4. Democracy is founded on the primacy of the law and the exercise of human rights. In a democratic State, no one is above the law and all are equal before the law.
5. Peace and economic, social, and cultural development are both conditions for and fruits of democracy. There is thus interdependence between peace, development, respect for, and observance of the rule of law and human rights.
6. Since democracy is based on everyone's right to participate in the running of public affairs, it necessitates the existence of representative institutions at all levels, most notably a Parliament that represents all facets of society and has the authority to legislate and supervise government actions in order to express the will of the people.
7. Free and fair elections that allow the people's will to be expressed on a regular basis are essential to the exercise of democracy. All voters must be able to select their representatives in an egalitarian, transparent, and open environment that fosters political competition. This requires that these elections be conducted using universal, equal, and secret suffrage. In light of this, civil and political rights are crucial, especially the freedoms to vote and to be elected, to assemble and express oneself, to obtain information, to form political parties and engage in political activity. To guarantee the integrity of the party, its organization, operations, finances, funding, and ethics must be appropriately and impartially regulated.
8. It is an essential function of the State to ensure the enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights to its citizens. Democracy thus goes hand in hand with an effective, honest and transparent government, freely chosen and accountable for its management of public affairs.
9. Democracy requires public accountability, which extends to all persons in positions of authority, elected or not, as well as to all public authority bodies in general. Accountability includes the public's right to know what the government is doing, the ability to petition the government, and the ability to seek remedies through fair administrative and legal processes.
10. The pillars of democracy's rule of law are independent, unbiased, and efficient oversight mechanisms and judicial institutions. In order for these institutions

and mechanisms to fully guarantee adherence to the law, enhance the equity of the procedures, and address injustices, everyone must have equal access to administrative and judicial remedies and respect for the rulings made by public authorities, state organs, and individual members of society.

Theoretical framework

This paper is to be discussed within the framework of elite theory. The theory is traceable according to Oluwasuji and Okajare (2), to the works of Wright Mill and Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), and Robert Michels (Robert Michels, 1961). The elite theory gives a philosophical explanation of the role of leadership in governance as it affects decision-making in all socio-economic and political matters. The central assumption of this theory is that every society, including democratic societies, is ruled by a small minority group who mostly occupy formal institutions of government and therefore determine factors in governance and decision-making processes. Mosca (1939) argues that every society is divided into two classes: the class that rules and the class that is ruled. The class that rules belongs to what they called "minority," while the class that is ruled belongs to "majority." The class that rules contains a small number of people and they possess all political power and privileges, whereas the class that is ruled consist of a large number of people and is subjected to the rule of the minority. He further explains that the ruling class is able to dominate the ruled/majority, because of its superior qualities which it has over the ruled class and as such can easily be manipulated by the elites.

In line with the above thoughts, the affairs of local governments in Nigeria are controlled by the political elites, who seize the opportunity of their political influence in the State to control and determine the affairs of local governments including election of the chairmen and members of the council for their selfish interests. The elite theory explains how politicians recruit themselves both at the national politics and at the local government politics. Local government elections are conducted under the guardian of the State governors who recruit their clients and legitimize them through election.

Methodology

This study was descriptive in methodology and relied on secondary sources of data, such as academic articles, journals, textbooks, online materials, newspapers, and official government documents. To complement the secondary data, the study considered the use of personal oral interviews

with the intention to get in-depth information about issues relating to the conduct of democracy in the local government council elections in Enugu State.

Results and discussion

Research question 1: How are local government elections in Nigeria

Long before the British colonial conquest, the various communities that later became modern Nigeria had one form of local administration and the other. What existed during that period were not democratically elected but traditional administrative councils that were uniquely designed and constituted by each ethnic group. As Fage (17) puts it, this system of local governance by appointed chiefs and rulers was what later metamorphosed and reformed into the Native Authority System in the colonial local government administration.

It was during the late colonial period that the first election into local government was organized. The three regions (North, West, and East) that were in existence at that time organized elections into their various local councils at different times and with different methods. The military government of General Aguiyi Ironsi that took over the government after a coup dissolved all the existing local government councils and replaced them with Sole Administrators who controlled the affairs of the local government until 1976. It was the 1976 local government reform that made provision for a uniform elective local government council throughout the country as against the different structures practiced by various States across the country (5).

There was no election into the local government council throughout the country during the second Republic, which was between 1979 and 1983. Babangida's government was credited for organizing December 1987 local government elections, which were conducted on a non-party basis. His government also adopted the 1989 Constitution and ensured that the 1990 local government elections were conducted.

General Sani Abacha made efforts to revive the local government administration by increasing the number of local governments in the country from 589 to 774. His 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 the Abacha self-succession transitional program as candidates had to identify with Abacha and his parties to be cleared or to win elections (18). After the death of General Sani Abacha, the then Head of State conducted the December 1998 local government elections in preparation to return to democratic rule on multi-party basis. This election created the basis for registration of political parties that contested at the State and federal levels in 1999.

Since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria fourth republic, which was on 1999, local government administration has witnessed more Caretakers Committee leadership than elected officials. The survey on local government elections carried out by Shineyoureye (19) revealed that as of June 27, 2019, only 16 States and the Federal capital territory out of the 36 States of the federation have elected persons running the affairs of their local governments. The 1999 constitution, section 7(1), guarantees that local governments should be run by democratically elected councils. The same Constitution requires all States to make legal provisions for establishment, structure, composition, finance, and functions of local governments. With this provision, the State governors are equipped with power to determine when and how elections into their local governments are to be conducted. The tenure of local government officials differs across the States in Nigeria because it is determined by each State government.

Initiative of enough is enough Nigeria (E/E Nigeria)

A close study of [Table 1](#) reveals that since the restoration of democracy in 1999, most, if not all, of the local government elections conducted by the States across the federation were usually won by parties in power in the States. A closer observation also reveals that State governors have power to dissolve and suspend local government council chairmen and also appoint Caretaker Committee to run the affairs of the local government. The major influence of the dissolution according to Obanwonyi and Aibieyi (20) was for political reasons. Governors dissolve and appoint Caretaker Committees or Caretaker Chairmen who owe total allegiance to their god-father governors.

Research question 2: How were local government elections in Enugu State in 2022

On 23 February 2022, the Enugu State Independent Electoral Commission (ENSIEC) conducted elections into the chairmanship and councillorship seats in the 17 local governments in Enugu State. This was as a result of the expiration of the tenure of elected council chairmen in the State. The last local government election prior to the 2022 elections was held on 29 February 2020. According to Daily Post February 24, 2022, the result of the local government elections of 2022 as announced by the ENSIEC Chairman Dr. Mike Ajogwu was that PDP candidates won all the 17 chairmanship and 260 councillorship seats in Enugu State. A similar scenario played out itself in 2020 local government elections of Enugu State, when the ENSIEC Chairman announced that Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP)

TABLE 1 | Local government elections in Nigeria (as of January 12, 2023).

State	Governing party	Previous	Most recent	Notes
Anambra	APGA	January 11, 2014	November 11, 2017	Local government run by caretaker committees
Akwa Ibom	PDP	June 9, 2021	December 4, 2021	Have elected chairman.
Adamawa	APC	November 24, 2012		Caretaker committee appointed to head admin after the end of elected c/mans tenure.
Abia	PDP	December 21, 2016	December 18, 2020	Have elected chairman
Bauchi	PDP		June 20, 2020	Governor sacked all caretaker committee, Director of Admin in each LGA is expected to take over administration.
Bayelsa	PDP	July 27, 2019	August 10, 2019	Have elected chairman
Benue	PDP	June 3, 2017	May 30, 2020	Have elected chairman
Borno	APC		November 28, 2020	L.G. run by caretaker committees
Cross River	PDP	March 28, 2020	May 30, 2020	Have elected chairman
Delta	PDP	October 25, 2014	March 6, 2021	Have elected chairman
Ebonyi	PDP	October 5, 2013	April 22, 2017	Have elected chairman
Edo	APC	April, 20, 2013	March 3, 2018	Have elected chairman
Ekiti	APC	December 7, 2019	December 4, 2021	Have elected chairman
Enugu	PDP	November 2, 2013	November 4, 2017	Have elected chairman
FCT	APC	March 19, 2016	March 2, 2019	Have elected chairman
Gombe	APC	February 23, 2013	February 25, 2017	Governor Yahaya dissolved council chairman and directed council secretaries to take over administration.
Imo	PDP		August 25, 2018	All L.G. chairmen were suspended, and deputy chairmen are Acting Chairman.
Jigawa	APC	July 1, 2017	June 29, 2019	Have elected chairman
Kaduna	APC	May 12, 2018	September 4, 2021	Have elected chairman
Kano	APC	February 10, 2018	January 16, 2021	Have elected chairman
Katsina	APC	August 2, 2014		Local government run by caretaker committees.
Kebbi	APC	September 15, 2012	July 15, 2017	Have elected chairman
Kogi	APC	May 4, 2013		L.G run by caretakers committees
Kwara	APC	October 26, 2013	November 18, 2017	All local government chairman suspended and Director of Admin in each local government is expected to take over administration.
Lagos	APC	July 22, 2017	July 24, 2021	Have elected chairman
Nasarawa	APC	May 26, 2018	October 6, 2021	Have elected chairman
Niger	APC	January 16, 2016	November 30, 2019	Have elected chairman
Ogun	APC	October 8, 2016	July 24, 2021	Have elected chairman
Ondo	APC	April 23, 2016	August 22, 2020	Have elected chairman
Osun	APC		January 27, 2018	Have elected chairman
Oyo	PDP	May 12, 2018	May 22, 2021	PDP wins all 33 LGA
Plateau	APC	October 10, 2018	October 9, 2021	Have elected chairman
Rivers	APC	June 16, 2018	April 17, 2021	Have elected chairman
Sokoto	PDP	July 23, 2011	March 27, 2021	Have elected chairman
Taraba	PDP	February 25, 2017	June 30, 2020	Have elected chairman
Yobe	APC	February 11, 2017	February 27, 2021	Have elected chairman
Zamfara	PDP	January 2, 2016	April 27, 2019	Have elected chairman

Source: Extracted from Shine your Eye website (2023).

candidates defeated their counterparts from 35 other political parties in the 29 February 2020 elections. He announced that PDP won all the 17 local government Chairman seats while in councillorship positions, PDP won majority out of 260 seats (21).

In an interview we had with the Commission's Head of Department (HOD) Legal section, we requested the

release of the 2022 local government election results to us, which she declined. She said that it was too early for us to demand for release of election results and that the results are still under litigation. However, she responded to other interview questions that gave us vital information on the subject under review. She informed us that five political parties contested for the 2022 local

government elections in Enugu State. The Political parties that contested are PDP, All Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Social Democratic Party (SDP), and Young Progressives Party (YPP). She also informed us that PDP won all the seats in 17 local government chairmanship positions and also in all the 260 councillorship seats.

In another interview with the Commission's Director of Admin (Mr. Ani Samuel), he also declined to our request for the release of the 2020 local government election results. When we demanded to know his reason for refusing to show us the results of the local government elections conducted in 2020, he said that we came late and that we should have come before the current elections. However, the website of Daily Post (22) disclosed some information which we used to compile temporary results for local government election chairmanship 2022 for the purposes of this study.

A close observation of **Table 2** reveals that local government elections in Enugu State are usually won by political party in power in the State, leaving nothing for the oppositions. It was as a result of this that some persons have called for the transfer of the power to conduct local government elections from State Independent Electoral Commission to the Independent National Electoral Commission (23).

A systematic study of the data in **Table 2** also reveals that cases of large-scale excessive manipulation are relatively obvious. Many manipulated elections are won by overwhelming margins of victory [(Simpers, 2008):

p. 1 in Omenma et al. (24)]. For instance, in Aninri local government, the PDP candidate scored 28,602 votes, while the APC candidate scored 7 and the APGA candidate scored 25 votes. In Nsukka local government, the PDP candidate scored 163,240 votes while the APGA candidate scored 55. Looking at these figures, one would observe that they were merely assigned to these parties, hence the reason for ENSIEC refusal to release the results to us. They know that people will criticize these results. It was obvious that both the electoral process and election management were not transparent.

From the interview conducted, it was only five political parties that contested for the 2022 local government elections in Enugu, as against thirty-five that contested in the year 2020. It could be that smaller parties were discouraged from participating because they know that the governor has used his power and influence to monopolize law enforcements, electoral management, and even the institution that organizes election. This strongly validates what Omenma et al. (24) called big cheat thesis that monopolized power by governor translates into massive electoral victory and as such discourages opponents from participating in elections.

There were also reports of low voter turnout. Part of the reasons was that candidates that contested for the election were imposed on them. The process of nominating candidates that contested was not transparent. It was alleged that the State Governor selected candidates of his choice, and because of this many people refused to come out to

TABLE 2 | 2022 election results for council chairman of 17 Local Government Area's (LGA's) Enugu State.

S/N	LGA	Name of candidate	Party	Score	Remarks
1.	Aninri	Benneth Aja	PDP	28,602	Elected
			APC	7	
			APGA	25	
2.	Awgu	Hon. Pedro Okwudili Nwankwo	PDP	43,327	Elected
3.	Enugu East	Hon. Livinus Nze	PDP	83,242	Elected
4.	Enugu North	Hon. Emeka Onunze	PDP	41,215	Elected
5.	Enugu South	Barr. Robinson Chimezie N.	PDP	54,220	Elected
6.	Ezeagu	Hon. Chukwudi Ozoeliba	PDP	56,611	Elected
7.	Igbo-Etiti	Hon. Anthony Ikenna Nwodo	PDP	35,044	Elected
8.	Igbo-Eze North	Hon. Williams Itodo	PDP	88,751	Elected
9.	Igbo-Eze South	Hon. Vitus Okechi	PDP	48,820	Elected
10.	Isi-Uzo	Hon. Obiora C. Obeagu	PDP	36,467	Elected
11.	Nkanu-East	Hon. Okechukwu E.	PDP	38,843	Elected
12.	Nkanu-West	Uchenna C. Ejim	PDP	6,379	Elected
13.	Nsukka	Walter Ozioko	PDP	163,240	Elected
			APGA	55	
14.	Oji River	Hon. Chinedu	PDP	58,652	Elected
15.	Udenu	Solomon Izuchukwu Edeh	PDP	36,467	Elected
16.	Udi	Philip Nnamdi Okoh	PDP	43,514	Elected
17.	Uzo-Uwani	Celestine Chukwudi Nnadozie	PDP	13,488	Elected

vote. Some people were afraid of coming out to cast their votes because of the feeling of insecurity. Literature indicates that the 2022 local government elections were also marred with violence and intimidation. It was as if they knew and decided not to come out. It was reported that gunmen invaded the polling units at Obeagu ward III in Enugu South local government area. Another polling unit at Akpugo in Nkanu West local government area was attacked. The armed men disrupted the exercise by destroying electoral materials after chasing voters away. So many people were killed, some injured while vehicles were set ablaze (25). The big question that is demanding an answer now is: Where do these figures representing votes for PDP come from? Who elected those Chairmen and Councilors?

Also emanating from the interview conducted, it was discovered that some of the *ad hoc* staff that were hired for election administration were hired in principle. Most of them were actually not contacted to administer the election because the whole exercise was shrouded in secrecy. This was the reality of the 2022 local government elections, which have features similar to those of the 2020 elections.

Research question 3: What roles did the State Governor play in the Local government elections in Enugu State

Since the inception of democracy in the country, the democratic foundations of the local governments have been doubtful and shaky. Local governments in Nigeria, in particular, Enugu State, are piloted by political appointees and democratically elected officials headed by chairmen and councilors. These officials have become working tools in the hands of State governors and ambitious political leaders, hence the inability of the local governments to produce leaders, elected following the democratic principles.

The Governors of Enugu State have become obstacle to the growth and development of democracy in the local government system of the State. The magnitude of the problems they are causing increased since the beginning of the fourth republic. This was as a result of the lopsidedness of statutory economic and political situations and positions on which local governments are placed in this country. The 1999 constitution recognizes the status of local government as the third tier of government in the country. But the same constitution denied the local governments its full autonomy, but rather gave the legal powers of control to the State governments. That is why State governors interfere in the elections of local governments.

We were made to understand that election is the major process of installing democracy at the local government. Elections are expected to satisfy some basic requirements such as free and fair among others, for a credible leader to be elected. How do you expect elections to be free and fair when the State governors is interfering and manipulating both

the electoral process and the election management? Starting from the local government primaries to the local government council election, the decision of Governors supersedes that of the citizens' choice. From the experience we had on the local government primary elections held in Enugu State, the Governor selected his choice candidates for his party and then organized a kangaroo primary. What we are saying in essence is that State governors' intrusion in local government elections does not allow citizens to choose their desired and choice of credible candidate that will represent them in government and this is a challenge to democracy.

Another angle to this discussion is on the appointment of Caretaker committee chairman in Enugu State. Governors sometimes can decide not to conduct election, but appoint Caretaker Committee Chairman to administer the local government. These appointments are usually for political reasons. This validates what Nwagwu (26) wrote: appointments were made to the administration of local government on partisan patronage, thereby instituting corrupt and unqualified personnel to man the affairs of local government. Even if the personnel appointed were very much qualified, the fact remains that the method with which they ascend office was not through free and fair election. The appointed Chairmen owe their allegiance to the governor that appointed them. They are not in any way accountable to the people because they never sought the mandate of the people to get the appointment. As a result, the socio-economic well-being of citizens in their localities, which is part of the democracy dividends expected from government, is ruled out completely. This very action of governors challenges democracy at the grassroot level.

Another angle to this discussion is that excessive interference and control by State governors undermine the autonomy of local government system and does not guarantee the requirements of regular election. That is why we do not have a uniform fixed tenure for local government officials in the country. In Enugu State, the tenure for local government chairmen and councilors was fixed for two years. But sometimes the State governors can decide not to hold elections on flimsy reasons. This type of decision does not fulfill the requirements of the principles of democracy, which states that there must be regular elections. Eme et al. (27) was in line with this thought, when they wrote that excessive intrusion and control by State governors undermine the autonomy of the local government system and has led to the dissolution of elected local government before the expiration of their tenure.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, it has become glaring, even to the common man on the street, that the State governors have hijacked democracy at the local government level. The people at

the grassroots no longer have a say in choosing who will be their local government chairmen and councilors, as State governors use their political powers and privileges to manipulate local government elections to install candidates of their choice. The key ingredient of democracy, which is “power to the people” is no longer feasible in the local grassroots. This is not good for democracy. The people have the right to determine who will govern them and when they are to leave office. The State governors are usurping their powers. As a matter of fact, Enugu State local government elections of 2020 and 2022 look like a mockery of election in a democratic setting. This is because elections lack some major requirements for a democratic system such as transparency, credibility, openness, competition freeness, and so on.

Recommendations

It is the view of this paper that the following recommendations would suffice in the face of democracy at the local government level.

- i. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria should be amended to grant full autonomy to local governments, so as to loosen them from the canopy of the State government, who manipulate local government elections to the detriment of the local populace.
- ii. State Independent Electoral Commissions should be scrapped and replaced with Independent National Electoral Commission. The purpose is to remove the hands of the State governors from manipulating the electoral processes.
- iii. Local government elections should be conducted at the time when the federal and State governors are conducting their own elections. This is to ensure regularity in the electoral process of local governments.

Conflict of interests

The authors affirm that they have no known financial or interpersonal conflicts that would have appeared to have an impact on the research described in this publication.

Author contributions

FO: developed the initial draft of the manuscript and deeply involved in planning and supervised the work, and the research methodology. CU: did the critical review of the overarching argument of the study and undertook management and coordination of the research activity and execution. EN: was equally helpful in the fieldwork

and editing of the final draft of the manuscript. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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