



Politics of Local Government Elections in Nigeria: Trends and the Way Forward



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Abstract: *The outcome of local government elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic for the past eleven years (2014 - 2025) have produced democracy without choice otherwise known as "winners take all". To the extent that virtually almost all the elections conducted by the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) across the thirty-six (36) States of the federation the ruling party won hundred (100) percent of the total seats contested for both the chairmen and councillorship elections. The focus of this paper is to analyze the contemporary political trends that define the nature of local government elections in Nigeria and suggest plausible way forward. Secondary source of data collection and descriptive analysis based on percentages were employed in the paper. Theory of accountability as propounded by Mark Philp on the concept of accountability and its relationship to political legitimacy guides the theoretical discussion of the paper. The paper reveals that sham elections were persistently conducted by the SIECs at the local government levels in the country which resulted to the majority of elected public office holders at the grassroots level have no regard to democratic ethos of transparency, accountability, responsiveness and service to humanity in discharge of the responsibility reposed on them by the electorates. By implication, their decisions and actions promote widening trust deficit between citizens and the government. It recommends for voter education, youth engagement in governance and need for reforming the institution responsible to conduct the local government elections in the country should be promoted.*

Keywords: Politics; Political Party; Local Government Elections; Trends; Accountability

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Introduction

Local government in a democratic setting globally is ought to operate at the grassroots level with relative autonomy both economically, politically and administratively, with a range of constitutionally assigned functions to perform and has its leadership be based on democratic representation.

Credible Local Government (LG) election is central to the promotion of smooth change of government through constitutional means. The politics of the conduct of the elections should be peaceful, and not a fight for survival but a competition to get into power and serve the people needs and aspirations with accountability. That, when the election is over, the losers accept the judgement of the voters. If the incumbent party loses, it turns over power

peacefully. No matter who wins, both parties agree to cooperate in solving the common problems of the society. The opposition continues to participate in public life with the knowledge that its role is essential in any democracy.

In Nigeria for example, provision in section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution as amended guarantees a system of local governments by democratically elected local government councils. However, the State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) were established in pursuant to the provisions of Section 197 (1) (b) do conduct elections at state levels of having elected local government chairmen and councillors but the conduct of the elections and the lessons learned out of it, were scary trend in which the politicians and parties in power control both the institutional and administrative election process of states they govern to decide and / or influence elections in their favour across all the states of the federation. By so doing, the government is not accountable to the yearning and aspirations of the people. Thus, where accountability is weak, it leads to chronic underperformance and outright failure of the local governments in the country. These attributed to the manifestation trends in LG elections faced with the one-party dominance in deciding the outcome of the elections, use of caretaker committee to manage the local government affairs instead of elected public officers, low voter turnout during the elections and serious boycotts of opposition parties in the elections.

The paper is made of five parts. Part, one deals with the introduction and statement of problem. Theoretical discussion of the paper makes for the second Part. In part three, explanation on the trends in Local Government elections in Nigeria is provided. Analysis of the Contemporary Political Trends of Local Government Elections in Nigeria is in part four. Whereas, conclusion and the suggested way forward complete the paper.

Statement of Problem

Despite the supreme court ruling on July 11, 2024 which passed verdict on the autonomy of Local Government Areas and prohibited governors from dissolving democratically elected council officials, many Nigerian states have been mandated to conduct elections to restore democratic governance at the local level. Yet, sham elections were conducted to justify one party dominance in winning all the contested seats in the local government elections in the country. The need to analyze the contemporary political trend that define the nature of local government elections in Nigeria and suggest plausible way forward informed this paper.

The paper attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What contemporary trends define LG elections in Nigeria?
2. How to analyze the contemporary trends define LG elections in Nigeria?
3. What are the ways to consider for credible LG elections in Nigeria?

Theoretical Discussion

Theory of accountability as advanced by Mark Philip in his work the concept of accountability and its relationship to political legitimacy was adopted to guide the discussion on the politics of local government elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. Some other notable contributors of the theory include Ruth Grant, Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye, etc. and their individual works; concept of accountability in the context of democratic governance; accountability in international organizations; and the concept of accountability in the context of global governance respectively.

The theory in the words of Guerin, et al., (2018) assumes that accountability lies at the heart of a healthy democracy which enables people to know how the government is doing and how to gain redress when things go wrong. As Philip (2009) argues that accountability is a crucial element of democratic legitimacy, as it empowers citizens to hold their leaders responsible.

Similarly, in the accountability discourse two actors played symbiotic roles. The actors as named by Behn (2001 cited in Hanberger 2006, p.6; Gambo and Ibrahim, 2024, p.104 - 105) referred to those that can be held to account as the accountability holdees, and their counterpart, that is those holding them to account, the accountability holders. Thus, an accountable government will help to increase the trustworthiness and legitimacy of the government in the eyes of the people.

The theory is relevant to the study because it will help to meet up with the expectations of local governance at the grassroots levels in Nigeria as follows: (a) to ensure that citizens not only have the constitutional right to air their grievances on the poor performance of government but also a democratic obligation on what is required to influence reciprocal accountability wherein they are all involved to hold one another answerable for specific commitment and activities in realization of set objectives which bring them together. (b) to make people accept democratic governance as the best form of government capable to develop and promote qualities of majority rule, tolerance, responsibility, independent voting power, accountability and responsiveness in governance. (c) create room for smooth change of government through adherence to constitutional means.

Explanation on the Trends in Local Government Elections in Nigeria

The salient trends in local government elections in Nigeria includes the following:

One party dominance in the outcome of local government elections. The prevalence of ruling party in deciding the outcome of local government elections at the state levels across all the 36 states is alarming and weaken democracy at the local government levels in the country.

Consistent use of Caretaker Committee instead of elected public office holders is another area concern which make local governments fail to meet basic democratic standards despite the constitutional provision of having a democratic local government in the country. The supreme ruling which banned the widespread practice of state governors appointing caretaker committees to manage local councils and prohibited federal allocations to councils administered by caretaker committees. Omidiji (2024) reported that while at least eleven Nigerian states have conducted Local Government elections to beat the federal government's October deadline, some have scheduled theirs for a later date.

Low voter turnout which resulted as a result of lack of credible local government elections, imposition of candidates, delayed elections, caretaker committees, lack of independence of SIECs and absence of local government autonomy in managing its affairs.

Boycotts by opposition parties resulted to the rigged elections before they occurred at the grassroots level and making a norm in the ruling party always prevail in forming government at the local governments in the country. There was evidence of cases of election boycotts whereby strong opposition party boycotts participation in local government elections in their respective for the mind sets of their participation will not change the outcome of the elections and the protection of security of its party members.

Notwithstanding, it is important to note that the trends of local government elections are many as brief explanation on the salient ones are explained but a modest attempt is required to analyze the current and persistent trend defining the local government elections in Nigeria.

Analysis of the Contemporary Political Trends of Local Government Elections in Nigeria

The contemporary and persistent trend defining the local government elections in Nigeria is based on the one-party dominance in determining the local government elections in its favour.

Therefore, the paper makes use of the six senatorial zones which comprise of multiple States each, in a table form in the analysis.

Table 1: North-Central

S/No.	State	Tenure of Local Government Elections	No. of Elections Conducted as at 2024/2025	No. of Seats won by Party	Percentage of the Elections Outcome
1.	Benue	3	7	APC won all the 23 LGA Seats	100
2.	Kogi	3	5	APC won all the 21 LGA Seats	100
3.	Kwara	3	6	APC won all the 16 LGA seats	100
4.	Nasarawa	1	6	APC won all the 23 LGA seats	100
5.	Niger	3	7	APC won all the 25 LGA seats	100
6.	Plateau	3	6	PDP won all the 17 LGA seats	100

Source: The Electoral Hub (2021), FOSIECON, Nigeria National Dailies, updated and compiled by the Author.

Table 1 above has shown and justified the dominance of party in power at the state levels in winning all the seats contested in the elections.

Table 2: North-East

S/No.	State	Tenure of Local Government Elections	No. of Elections Conducted as at 2024/2025	No. of Seats won by Party	Percentage of the Elections Outcome
1.	Adamawa	2.5	7	PDP won all the 21 LGA Seats	100
2.	Bauchi	2	5	PDP won all the 20 LGA Seats	100
3.	Borno	2	5	APC won all the 27 LGA seats	100
4.	Gombe	2	5	APC won all the 11 LGA seats	100
5.	Taraba	3	7	PDP won all the 16LGA seats	100
6.	Yobe	3	7	APC won all the 17 LGA seats	100

Source: The Electoral Hub (2021), FOSIECON, Nigeria National Dailies, updated and compiled by the Author.

Table 2 above has revealed and justified the dominance of party in power at the state levels in winning all the seats contested in the elections.

Table 3: North-West

S/No.	State	Tenure of Local Government Elections	No. of Elections Conducted as at 2024/2025	No. of Seats won by Party	Percentage of the Elections Outcome
1.	Jigawa	2	6	APC won all the 27 LGA Seats	100
2.	Kaduna	2	6	APC won all the 23 LGA Seats	100
3.	Kano	2	8	NNPP won all the 44 LGA seats	100
4.	Katsina	3	5	APC won all the 24 LGA seats	100
5.	Kebbi	3	7	APC won all the 21 LGA seats	100

6.	Sokoto	3	6	APC won all the 23 LGA seats	100
7.	Zamfara	3	6	PDP won all the 14 LGA Seats	100

Source: The Electoral Hub (2021), FOSIECON, Nigeria National Dailies, updated and compiled by the Author.

The information provided in Table 3 has shown the dominance of party in power at the State levels in winning all the seats contested in the elections.

Table 4: South-East

S/No.	State	Tenure of Local Government Elections	No. of Elections Conducted as at 2024/2025	No. of Seats won by Party	Percentage of the Elections Outcome
1.	Abia	2	6	ZLP won 15 LGA Seats and YPP won 2	88 12
2.	Anambra	2	3	APC won all the 21 LGA Seats	100
3.	Ebonyi	3	7	APC won all the 13 LGA seats	100
4.	Enugu	2	8	PDP won all the 17 LGA seats	100
5.	Imo	2	5	APC won all the 16 LGA seats	100

Source: The Electoral Hub (2021), FOSIECON, Nigeria National Dailies, updated and compiled by the Author.

The breakdown in the Table 4 has shown the dominance of party in power at the state levels in winning all the seats contested in the elections.

Table 5: South-South

S/No.	State	Tenure of Local Government Elections	No. of Elections Conducted as at 2024/2025	No. of Seats won by Party	Percentage of the Elections Outcome
1.	Akwa Ibom	3	7	PDP won 30 out of 31 LGA Seats	97
2.	Bayelsa	3	7	PDP won 30 out of 8 LGA Seats	100
3.	Cross River	3	7	APC won all the 18 LGA Seats	100
4.	Delta	3	7	PDP won all the 25 LGA seats	100
5.	Edo	3	5	No result as EDSIIEC schedule the election to July 11, 2026	-
6.	Rivers	3	7	APC won 20 LGA Seats and PDP won 3	87 13

Source: The Electoral Hub (2021), FOSIECON, Nigeria National Dailies, updated and compiled by the Author.

The Table 5 above illustrated the dominance of party in power at the state levels in winning all the seats contested in the elections.

Table 6: South-West

S/No.	State	Tenure of Local Government Elections	No. of Elections Conducted as at 2024/2025	No. of Seats won by Party	Percentage of the Elections Outcome
1.	Edo	3	6	APC won all the 38 LGA Seats	100
2.	Lagos	3	6	APC won all the 57 LGA Seats	100
3.	Ogun	3	6	APC won all the 20 LGA seats	100

4.	Ondo	3	6	APC won all the 18 LGA seats	100
5.	Osun	3	5	PDP won all the 30 LGA seats	100
6.	Oyo	3	6	PDP won all the 32 LGA seats	100

Source: The Electoral Hub (2021), FOSIECON, Nigeria National Dailies, updated and compiled by the Author.

Table 6 above indicated that the dominance of party in power at the state levels in winning all the seats contested in the elections.

Conclusion

Local Government elections in Nigeria despite its importance to the promotion of democratic values and sustenance are marred with lots of irregularities and often compromised by the State politics. To the extent that the lessons learned out of their conduct, were scary trend in which the politicians and parties in power control both the institutional and administrative election process of states they govern to decide and / or influence elections in their favour across all the states of the federation.

The paper in its analysis across all the six senatorial zones has shown the evidence that ruling parties in states dominates SIECs and manipulate outcomes whereby, the LG elections often result in one party wins all the seats contested in the elections in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The paper established that it is only Edo State out of the 36 states in Nigeria has caretaker committee managing the local government affairs. Although, it complied with supreme ruling of rescheduling the LG election to take place July 11, 2026 by the Edo State Independent Electoral Commission (EDISIEC).

The paper also in its findings revealed the extent of limited low voter turnout due to the fact of limited citizen confidence in LG elections in the country. Therefore, voter apathy has become the manifestation feature of the elections.

The paper has shown the evidence of prospects of LG elections that their compliance to conduct of elections in all the states can strengthen LG elections through gradual process in the country.

The Way Forward

The paper based on its findings, suggest the way forward to make the following recommendations:

1. There is need for the urgent reforms to make LG elections free, fair, credible in which the voters vote count.
2. Government should promote civic education to increase grassroots participation in the election. This will help boost awareness on the importance of local governance through adequate voter education.
3. Federal Government should strengthen LG autonomy through enforcement of the supreme court ruling of banning caretaker committee and prohibited federal allocation to any recalcitrant state.
4. Constitutional amendment should be made to transfer LG election responsibility to either INEC or assent to the proposed bill of having Nigeria Independent Local Government Electoral Commission (NILGEC) to oversee elections and reducing state interference at barest minimal level.

5. Government should encourage the use of electronic voting and digital platforms to improve the credibility of LG elections. This should be enhanced through training of permanent and ad hoc election personnels.

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