

# Local Government Autonomy: A Deep Analysis of Management and Community Leadership in Grassroots Development in the Local Government Area of Lagos, Nigeria

<sup>1</sup>Akintunde Sunday Emmanuel, <sup>2</sup>Iwuozor Odili Markanthony & <sup>3</sup>Oloruntoba Elizabeth Oluwatosin

<sup>1,2</sup>Departement of Business Administration, University of Abuja, Abuja, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup> Oil And Gas Management, Global Wealth University, Lome, Togo

<sup>1</sup>[sundayakintunde@yahoo.com](mailto:sundayakintunde@yahoo.com); <sup>2</sup>[iwuozor.odili@uniabuja.edu.ng](mailto:iwuozor.odili@uniabuja.edu.ng); <sup>3</sup>[tosinmattew2022@gmail.com](mailto:tosinmattew2022@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT** Local governments are pivotal to grassroots development, serving as the closest tier of government to the people. However, their effectiveness is frequently constrained by limited autonomy and interference from higher authorities, particularly in Lagos State, Nigeria. This study explores the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development, emphasizing the extent to which financial and administrative independence impact developmental outcomes. Using a mixed-methods approach, structured questionnaires were administered to local government officials, community leaders, and residents across six Area Councils. Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression, revealed a moderate to strong positive relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development. Key challenges, such as limited financial independence and excessive state-level control, were identified as significant barriers. These findings provide empirical evidence of the measurable impact of autonomy on critical development sectors, contributing to the understanding of governance in Nigeria. The study underscores the need for reforms to enhance local government autonomy, reduce interference, and strengthen governance structures to improve service delivery. By highlighting the importance of financial and administrative independence, this research offers valuable insights for policymakers and scholars, advancing the discourse on sustainable grassroots development. Further research is recommended to investigate the mechanisms through which autonomy drives development outcomes across varying contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Governance Reforms, Grassroots Development, Local Governance, State-level Interference, Sustainable Development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Local governments play a pivotal role in fostering grassroots development by serving as the closest tier of government to the people. They act as platforms for managing community affairs and addressing local needs. In Lagos State, Nigeria, local governments are constitutionally established to perform specific statutory functions autonomously, as highlighted in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Section 7). These functions include economic planning, provision of basic social amenities, and rural development. However, despite the legal framework designed to ensure financial and administrative independence, local governments often face significant interference from state authorities, undermining their effectiveness (Ekpo & Ndebbio, 2022). In Lagos State, local governments are particularly challenged by limited autonomy, insufficient funding, and frequent political interference (Ekwueme, 2023). This problem is compounded by issues such as corruption, mismanagement, and a lack of capacity for strategic planning. Consequently, their ability to execute developmental projects in areas like education, healthcare, infrastructure, and agriculture remains constrained. These limitations have resulted in suboptimal performance, raising concerns about the capacity of local governments in Lagos State to achieve sustainable grassroots development. Addressing the problem requires an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing local government autonomy and their implications for development outcomes in the state. The overarching

goal of this study is to analyze the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Investigate the level of autonomy enjoyed by local governments in Lagos State.
- ii. Assess the impact of local government autonomy on grassroots development in the state.
- iii. Identify the barriers and challenges local governments face in achieving autonomy.

The motivation for this study arises from identified gaps in the existing literature. While numerous studies explore the broader challenges of local governance in Nigeria, they often overlook the unique socio-political and economic dynamics of Lagos State. For example, Olawale and Eze (2023) investigated local government challenges in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), emphasizing financial constraints and political interference as significant obstacles. However, their findings may not fully apply to Lagos, where urbanization, population pressures, and economic complexity necessitate a more localized approach. Similarly, Ibrahim (2022) found a positive correlation between local government autonomy and rural development in Northern Nigeria. Yet, this rural focus restricts the relevance of their findings for urban environments like Lagos. Likewise, Adeyemi (2021) examined local government autonomy in the South-West region but failed to address the distinct socio-economic and cultural dynamics of Lagos State, which serves as Nigeria's commercial hub.

Key gaps in the literature underscore the need for this study. Many existing studies have regional limitations, focusing on areas such as the South-West or Northern Nigeria, without adequately capturing Lagos' unique position as an urban and commercial center. Additionally, there is a neglect of multi-dimensional autonomy, with few studies examining the interplay of financial, administrative, and political autonomy and how their combined influence affects development outcomes. Furthermore, while several studies propose reforms, they often lack tailored and actionable recommendations that address the specific challenges of local governments in different contexts. Moreover, limited attention has been given to the socio-economic, cultural, and historical factors shaping the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development. This study seeks to address these gaps by exploring the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos State. It provides empirical insights into the financial, administrative, and political dimensions of autonomy, identifies context-specific barriers, and offers actionable policy recommendations tailored to Lagos' socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Lagos State, with its rapidly growing population and diverse socio-economic landscape, presents an ideal context for this analysis. As Nigeria's commercial hub, the state requires responsive and efficient grassroots governance to tackle its developmental challenges. Local governments play a critical role in bridging the gap between state-level policies and community needs, ensuring that development reaches even the most marginalized areas. However, systemic issues such as limited financial control, administrative inefficiencies, and undue state influence continue to hinder their effectiveness. By examining these challenges, this study provides evidence-based insights to enhance local governance, improve service delivery, and promote sustainable grassroots development in Lagos State.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Local Government Autonomy

Local government autonomy refers to the degree of independence and self-governance enjoyed by local governments in decision-making, financial management, and the implementation of development policies without undue interference from higher tiers of government. According to Ekpo and Ndebbio (2022), autonomy is critical to enabling local governments to address the unique needs of their communities, fostering grassroots participation in governance, and improving service delivery. While the 1999 Nigerian Constitution provides a framework for local government autonomy, its implementation has been hampered by state control and centralized power. Olaoye (2021) emphasizes that local government autonomy is the foundation for effective grassroots development, as it empowers local leaders to prioritize community-specific projects. However, in Nigeria, autonomy has been undermined by inadequate financial resources and political interference. Ekwueme (2023) observes that state governments often dominate local

governments by controlling their finances and decision-making processes, thereby hindering their ability to fulfill their developmental roles.

### **Grassroots Development**

Grassroots development focuses on improving living conditions, infrastructure, and socio-economic status at the local level. This bottom-up approach emphasizes community participation in identifying and solving local problems. Ugochukwu and Nnaji (2020) assert that local governments play a pivotal role in grassroots development by providing essential services such as healthcare, education, water supply, and rural infrastructure. Despite this potential, Umeh (2022) notes that grassroots development in Nigeria has been slow, primarily due to the limited autonomy of local governments. This lack of autonomy restricts their ability to initiate and sustain development projects. Furthermore, local governments' reliance on federal allocations and state-level approvals often delays project implementation. Akindele (2021) highlights that this delay diminishes the expected impact of local governments on grassroots development, perpetuating poverty and underdevelopment in many rural and urban areas.

### **Local Government Autonomy and Grassroots Development**

The relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development has been widely studied. Research suggests that greater autonomy enables local governments to address community-specific developmental needs more effectively. For instance, Amadi (2021) found that local governments with control over their finances and decision-making processes demonstrated higher effectiveness in delivering public services and implementing infrastructure projects. The study also highlighted that autonomous local governments foster greater community participation, a key driver of sustainable grassroots development. However, Nwanne (2023) argues that autonomy alone is insufficient for achieving grassroots development. Factors such as leadership quality, resource availability, and strategic planning capacity significantly influence outcomes. Local governments lacking competent leadership and necessary resources may struggle to achieve their goals despite having autonomy. Therefore, capacity-building initiatives must complement autonomy to enhance local governments' effectiveness.

### **Challenges to Local Government Autonomy in Nigeria**

Local government autonomy in Nigeria, particularly in Lagos, faces several challenges, including political interference, inadequate financial resources, corruption, and poor leadership. Political interference by state governments is a significant barrier to local government autonomy. Okonkwo and Chinedu (2021) note that state governors often control local government finances through the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA), which undermines the financial independence of local governments. This control limits local governments' ability to initiate and execute development projects, thereby stifling grassroots development. Inadequate funding is another critical challenge. Ugwu and Adebayo (2020) observe that local governments heavily rely on federal allocations, which are often insufficient to meet developmental needs. Additionally, over-reliance on federal funds discourages local governments from exploring alternative revenue sources such as internally generated revenue (IGR), further restricting their financial autonomy.

Corruption and mismanagement of resources are pervasive issues. Afolabi and Adeyemi (2022) argue that embezzlement and poor financial management by local government officials hinder the effective use of resources for development. The lack of transparency and accountability in local government administration exacerbates these challenges, eroding public trust and reducing community participation in governance. Leadership plays a pivotal role in local government performance. Bello (2023) highlights that many local government leaders in Nigeria lack the necessary skills and vision to drive development. Ineffective leadership leads to poor governance, inadequate planning, and suboptimal execution of development projects. To address this, leadership training and capacity-building programs are essential for improving local government performance.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored Decentralization Theory and Participatory Governance Theory that highlights the crucial role of local government autonomy in strengthening grassroots governance. Decentralization Theory, which posits that delegating power and resources to local governments enhances efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness to local needs. Smith (2022) asserts that decentralization fosters community participation in decision-making and strengthens local governments' capacity to implement policies tailored to their communities. Improved service delivery and governance at the grassroots level are key benefits of decentralization, as it reduces bureaucratic delays typical of centralized systems. Additionally, the study employs the Participatory Governance Theory, which emphasizes the active involvement of local communities in governance processes. Ojo (2020) contends that community participation ensures local governments remain accountable and responsive to the people's needs. By leveraging the knowledge and expertise of community members, participatory governance leads to more effective and sustainable development outcomes. According to the Decentralization Theory, delegating power and resources to local governments enhances their ability to respond more effectively to the needs of their communities. In the case of Lagos, this autonomy allows local governments to tailor their policies and programs to meet specific local needs, which improves service delivery. Local governments, having greater control over sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, are able to address local concerns more promptly compared to centralized systems that may face bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies (Smith, 2022). The theory also asserts that decentralization leads to increased efficiency and accountability. By transferring authority to the local level, local governments become more autonomous, reducing their reliance on higher levels of government. This autonomy fosters greater accountability, as local leaders are directly responsible to their communities. In Lagos, this means that local government officials would be more responsive to citizens, knowing they are directly accountable to them for both service delivery and resource management (Smith, 2022).

Furthermore, decentralization promotes local decision-making by empowering local leaders to make decisions that directly affect their communities. This autonomy enables local governments to develop tailored, context-specific solutions that are more effective in addressing local challenges. If local government autonomy in Lagos is fully realized, it would facilitate more inclusive and context-sensitive decision-making, ultimately enhancing community trust in local authorities and improving overall governance (Smith, 2022). The Participatory Governance Theory emphasizes the importance of active community involvement in governance. In the context of Lagos, this theory underscores the need for local governments to engage with citizens at the grassroots level to ensure that policies and programs reflect the true needs and priorities of the community. By involving community members in decision-making processes, local governments can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among the people, leading to more effective and sustainable development outcomes (Ojo, 2020). Participatory governance also enhances accountability and responsiveness. When communities are involved in governance processes, they can hold local officials accountable for their actions, leading to better service delivery and more responsive government actions. In Lagos, this would result in local government actions that are not only better aligned with community needs but are also more transparent and accountable to the public (Ojo, 2020).

Additionally, participatory governance contributes to the sustainability of development initiatives. By incorporating the knowledge, perspectives, and expertise of local community members, development initiatives are more likely to be effective and sustainable. Community involvement ensures that projects are grounded in local realities and aspirations, which increases the likelihood of long-term success. In Lagos, combining local government autonomy with participatory governance would support the implementation of more sustainable policies, especially in areas like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, where local input is vital for lasting impact (Ojo, 2020). The integration of the Decentralization Theory and Participatory Governance Theory highlights the crucial role of local government autonomy in strengthening grassroots governance. Empowering local governments with decision-making authority, while fostering active community participation, can improve service delivery, increase accountability, and create more sustainable development outcomes in Lagos. Local government autonomy also has the potential to reduce

the overreach of state government interference, which has historically hindered local governments' ability to effectively address community needs. By applying these theories, the study suggests that a more autonomous local government in Lagos, supported by participatory governance, would not only improve service delivery but also contribute to the overall development of the local areas, building greater trust between government officials and citizens (Ojo, 2020; Smith, 2022).

### Empirical Studies

Numerous studies have explored the impact of local government autonomy on grassroots development in Nigeria. For instance, Olawale and Eze (2023) examined the challenges facing local governments in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and identified financial constraints and political interference as the primary obstacles to effective grassroots development. While this study highlights critical challenges, it does not provide a comprehensive analysis of these issues within Lagos' unique context. Similarly, Ibrahim (2022) assessed the role of local governments in promoting rural development in Northern Nigeria and found that higher levels of autonomy positively correlated with successful implementation of rural development projects. However, this study's focus on rural areas may not fully address the challenges faced by urban local governments in Lagos. Adeyemi (2021) investigated local government autonomy in the South-West region and found that greater autonomy resulted in improved service delivery and enhanced community participation in governance. However, the study's focus on the South-West limits its applicability to other regions, such as Lagos, which may have distinct socio-political dynamics. Existing literature highlights several gaps in understanding the dynamics of local government autonomy and grassroots development: Most studies focus on specific regions, such as the South-West or Northern Nigeria, leaving a gap in understanding how local government autonomy affects diverse regions, including Lagos. Limited attention has been given to socio-economic, cultural, and historical factors that influence the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development also Few studies examine the interplay of financial, administrative, and political dimensions of autonomy and their unique contributions to development outcomes. While many studies suggest reforms, they often lack actionable recommendations tailored to the unique contexts of different local governments. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos, Nigeria, providing actionable insights for enhancing local governance and community leadership.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive survey research design, which is suitable for examining the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos, Nigeria. The design facilitates the collection of data from a large population, allowing for the analysis of trends, attitudes, and the impact of local government autonomy on grassroots development. This approach is effective for exploring both the current state of local government autonomy and the challenges faced in promoting grassroots development.

The study's population includes local government officials, community leaders, and residents from the 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Lagos State. These LGAs represent the local government structure in Lagos, making them ideal for examining the level of autonomy and its effects on grassroots development. According to Lagos State government records, the total population of these LGAs exceeds 20 million, with key administrative and community leadership roles held by elected and appointed officials (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

Cochran's sample size formula is:

$$n = (Z^2 * p * q) / E^2$$

Where:

n = sample size

Z = Z-score corresponding to the desired confidence level (e.g., 1.96 for 95% confidence)

p = proportion of the population (estimated)

q = 1 - p



E = margin of error (desired precision)

Assuming: Confidence level: 95% ( $Z = 1.96$ ), Margin of error (E): 5% (0.05) and Proportion (p): 0.5

Therefore

$$n = (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5) / 0.05^2$$

$$n = (3.8416 * 0.25) / 0.0025$$

$$n = 0.9604 / 0.0025$$

$$n \approx 384.16$$

To ensure a balanced representation of urban and rural perspectives across the 20 LGAs, the sample size was rounded up to 400 respondents. This ensures that each LGA is adequately represented and that any non-responses or incomplete data collection can be accommodated without compromising statistical validity. The sample consists of local government officials, council staff, community leaders, and selected residents. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across all LGAs, capturing diverse perspectives and accounting for variations in administrative performance and grassroots needs.

The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, designed to capture respondents' perceptions of local government autonomy and its impact on grassroots development. The questionnaire consists of four sections: demographic information, local government autonomy, grassroots development, and challenges hindering autonomy. A four-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' attitudes, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in public administration and governance. Content validity was further enhanced through a pilot study with 30 respondents from Ikeja LGA to identify potential issues with clarity and relevance. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating high internal consistency. Data collection took place over four weeks. Questionnaires were distributed both in person and electronically. Local government officials and community leaders were approached directly, while residents were reached through an online platform (Google Forms). Trained research assistants facilitated data collection in each LGA, ensuring a comprehensive and effective process. Several strategies were implemented to minimize response bias and enhance the reliability and validity of the collected data. First, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage honest participation, particularly from local government officials who might otherwise fear repercussions for disclosing challenges within their systems. The questionnaire was designed with neutral and unbiased language to avoid leading respondents toward particular answers. For example, instead of phrasing questions as "Do you think the lack of autonomy hinders development?" balanced phrasing such as "How does the level of local government autonomy influence grassroots development?" was used.

A pilot study involving 30 respondents from Ikeja LGA was conducted to refine the questionnaire. Feedback from this pilot helped identify ambiguous or potentially biased questions, ensuring the instrument was culturally and contextually appropriate. A diverse sampling approach using stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation across all 20 LGAs in Lagos State, capturing perspectives from urban and rural areas. This helped balance views from respondents with varying socio-economic, administrative, and developmental experiences. Trained research assistants were deployed to minimize interviewer bias. They maintained neutral behavior and provided necessary clarifications without influencing respondents' answers, which was particularly important during in-person questionnaire distribution. To further reduce bias, multiple data collection channels were employed. Questionnaires were distributed both in person and electronically, allowing respondents to answer in private, pressure-free environments while ensuring inclusivity, particularly in rural areas with limited internet access.

To counter acquiescence bias, the order of questions in the electronic questionnaire was randomized for each respondent, encouraging thoughtful consideration of each item. After data collection, responses were reviewed for patterns indicating potential bias, such as consistently selecting the same option across all items. Anomalies were flagged, and where feasible, follow-up checks were conducted. Balancing urban and rural perspectives was a key focus of the study. Stratified random sampling allocated respondents proportionally based on population size and administrative structure in each LGA. Research assistants facilitated questionnaire distribution and collection in rural areas, addressing logistical challenges such as

poor infrastructure and limited connectivity. Additionally, demographic data collected during the survey enabled separate analyses of urban and rural respondents' perspectives, capturing distinct trends and challenges unique to each context.

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and means, were used to summarize demographic data and respondents' perceptions. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development. Hypotheses were tested using SPSS (version 28) to assess the significance of the relationships between variables. Ethical approval was obtained from the Lagos State research ethics committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants, who were assured that their responses would remain confidential. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any time without consequences. The collected data was used solely for academic purposes, in accordance with ethical research practices. The study acknowledges potential limitations, such as response bias, as some local government officials may hesitate to disclose challenges related to autonomy. Additionally, logistical challenges in reaching rural areas of Lagos State may limit data collection. However, the use of stratified random sampling and a well-designed questionnaire helps mitigate these challenges, ensuring the reliability of the findings.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

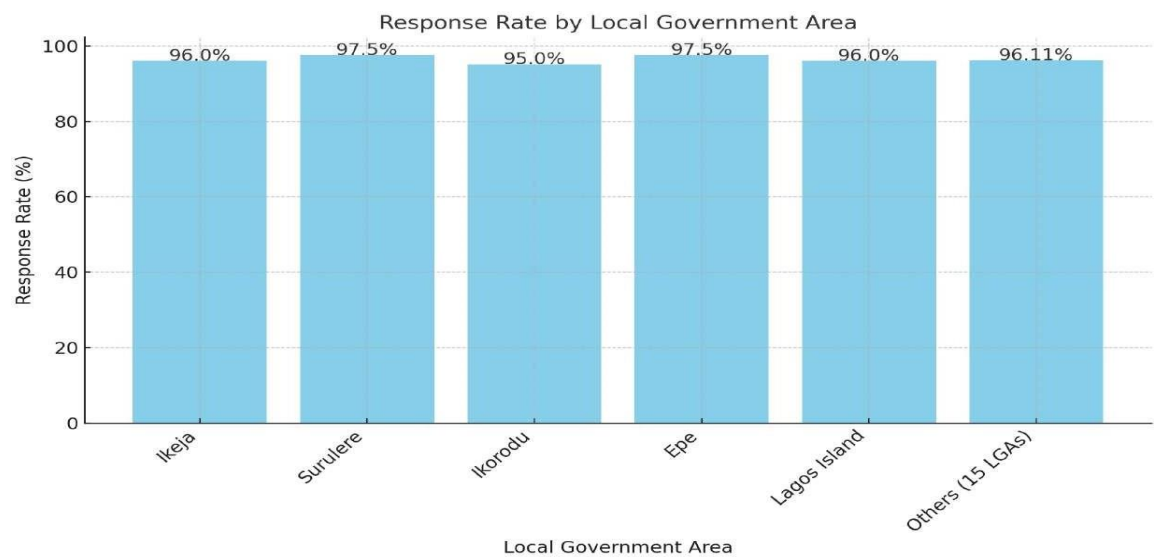
### Response Rate

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed across the selected LGAs, with 385 returned, yielding a response rate of 96.25%. This high response rate can be attributed to the use of in-person and digital distribution channels, as well as the assistance of research aides in the LGAs.

**Table 1:** Response Rate by Local Government Area

Local Government Area	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate (%)
Ikeja	50	48	96.00%
Surulere	40	39	97.50%
Ikorodu	40	38	95.00%
Epe	40	39	97.50%
Lagos Island	50	48	96.00%
Others (15 LGAs)	180	173	96.11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>96.25%</b>

From Table 1, the distribution and collection of questionnaires were consistent across the LGAs, with response rates ranging from 95.00% to 97.50%. This uniformity reflects the effectiveness of the distribution method and the respondents' willingness to participate. The relatively higher response rates in LGAs such as Surulere and Epe (97.50%) suggest stronger engagement, possibly due to better outreach or interest in the study. This is further representing bar chart bellow



**Figure 1:** Bar Chart Representing the Response Rate by Local Government Area (LGA).

The chart highlights the response rates across the different LGAs, with Surulere and Epe showing the highest response rates at 97.50%, while Ikorodu has the lowest at 95.00%. The overall response rate stands at 96.25%.

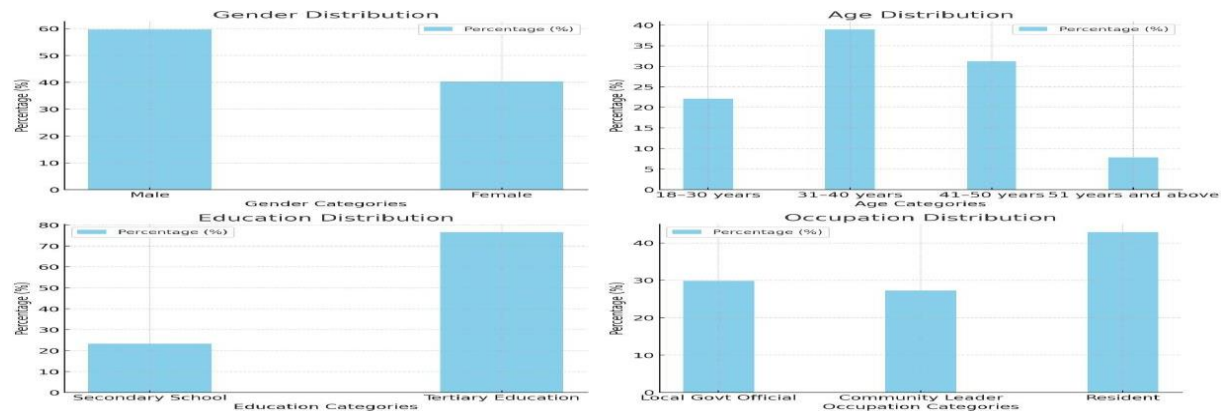
**Table 2:** Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	230	59.74
Female	155	40.26
<b>Age</b>		
18–30 years	85	22.08
31–40 years	150	38.96
41–50 years	120	31.17
51 years and above	30	7.79
<b>Education</b>		
Secondary School	90	23.38
Tertiary Education	295	76.62
<b>Occupation</b>		
Local Govt Official	115	29.87
Community Leader	105	27.27
Resident	165	42.86

The demographic distribution from the above table shows a diverse sample, ensuring representativeness in gender, age, education, and occupation. The majority (59.74%) were male, which could reflect the demographic composition of the target population. Respondents aged 31–40 years formed the largest group (38.96%), suggesting active involvement of middle-aged individuals. Most respondents (76.62%) had tertiary education, highlighting a literate population capable of providing informed responses. Occupation-wise, residents formed the largest group (42.86%), ensuring perspectives beyond just officials and leaders. This is also visualized in figure 2, using clustered bar charts. The charts show the improvement in the



distribution for variables such as gender, age, education level, and occupation, with percentages represented for each category within these variables.



**Figure 2:** Clustered bar charts showing the improvement in the distribution for variables such as gender, age, education level, and occupation, with percentages represented for each category within these variables.

This is followed by Respondents' perceptions of local government autonomy were assessed using a four-point Likert scale, focusing on political, administrative, and financial independence in table 3.

**Table 3:** Perception of Local Government Autonomy

Autonomy Factor	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Local governments can make decisions independently	48.31	39.74	9.09	2.86
Local governments have control over their budget	42.34	43.90	10.39	3.37
State government interference limits autonomy	63.12	23.38	7.79	5.71

The respondents' perceptions from the above analysis indicate mixed feelings about local government autonomy. While a majority agree that local governments can make decisions independently (88.05% combining "Strongly Agree" and "Agree"), a significant portion (66.50%) acknowledge the constraining effects of state government interference. The high agreement on control over budgets (86.24%) suggests awareness of financial autonomy but with limitations, as evidenced by concerns about interference. The analysis highlights the perceived impact of local government autonomy on sectors such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

**Table 4:** Impact of Autonomy on Grassroots Development

Development Sector	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Improved healthcare services	50.91	36.36	9.35	3.38
Increased infrastructure	46.75	40.00	8.57	4.68
Enhanced education provision	54.81	34.29	7.27	3.63

From table 4 above, the perceived impact of local government autonomy on grassroots development is overwhelmingly positive. The highest agreement is seen in education provision (89.10%), followed by

healthcare services (87.27%) and infrastructure development (86.75%). These findings emphasize the importance of autonomy in addressing critical developmental needs, reinforcing the role of local governments as catalysts for community growth. Respondents identified major challenges affecting autonomy, including interference from state governments, insufficient financial resources, and mismanagement.

Table 5: Challenges Hindering Autonomy

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interference from State Government	270	70.13
Insufficient Financial Resources	250	64.94
Mismanagement of Funds	200	51.95
Lack of Skilled Personnel	115	29.87

Table 5 above indicates that State government interference (70.13%) and insufficient financial resources (64.94%) are the most significant barriers to local government autonomy. These challenges limit operational capacity and decision-making effectiveness. Mismanagement of funds (51.95%) and lack of skilled personnel (29.87%) further complicate governance, indicating a need for improved financial oversight and capacity-building initiatives.

Inferential Statistics: Hypothesis Testing

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos State. The analysis aimed to assess the extent to which local government autonomy contributes to grassroots development.

Table 6: Regression Analysis Summary

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	p-value
Local Govt Autonomy and Development	0.692	0.479	62.435	0.000

The regression analysis reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development ( $R = 0.692$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The coefficient of determination,  $R^2 = 0.479$ , indicates that 47.9% of the variation in grassroots development is explained by local government autonomy. This suggests that the autonomy granted to local governments substantially impacts grassroots development initiatives. The high F-statistic ( $F = 62.435$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) further confirms the significance of the model. The results provide robust evidence to support the assertion that improving local government autonomy positively influences grassroots development outcomes.

### Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

The ANOVA was conducted to validate the significance of the regression model in explaining the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development.

**Table 7:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Summary

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
<b>Regression</b>	1.637	1	1.637	62.435	0.000
<b>Residual</b>	2.938	383	0.00767		
<b>Total</b>	3.417	384			

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ( $F=62.435, p<0.05$   $F=62.435, p < 0.05$ ). The regression sum of squares ( $SS_{reg}=1.637$   $SS_{reg} = 1.637$ ) represents the portion of the total variance in grassroots development that is explained by local government autonomy. The residual sum of squares ( $SS_{res}=2.938$   $SS_{res} = 2.938$ ) reflects the variance unexplained by the model. The total sum of squares ( $SS_{total}=3.417$   $SS_{total} = 3.417$ ) represents the overall variance in grassroots development. These results align with the  $R^2$  value, confirming that 47.9% of the variation in grassroots development can be attributed to local government autonomy.

### Regression Coefficients

The regression coefficients provide insights into the magnitude and direction of the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development.

**Table 8:** Coefficients Summary for the Regression Model

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
<b>Constant</b>	3.235	0.0983	32.926	0.000
<b>Local Govt Autonomy</b>	0.598	0.068	8.738	0.000

The constant ( $B=3.235, p<0.05$   $B = 3.235, p < 0.05$ ) represents the baseline level of grassroots development when local government autonomy is zero. This value indicates the foundational level of development independent of autonomy factors. The coefficient for local government autonomy ( $B=0.598, t=8.738, p<0.05$   $B = 0.598, t = 8.738, p < 0.05$ ) demonstrates a strong and statistically significant positive effect on grassroots development. For every one-unit increase in local government autonomy, grassroots development improves by 0.598 units, holding other factors constant.

### Test of Hypotheses

Based on the findings of the study, the following hypotheses were tested and evaluated:

**Hypothesis 1:** Local governments in Lagos do not enjoy significant autonomy. The results of the analysis led to the rejection of this hypothesis. While respondents acknowledged that local governments in Lagos State have a degree of autonomy, it is evident that this autonomy is often constrained by interference from state governments. Such interference limits the capacity of local governments to exercise full control over administrative and financial decisions, thereby hindering their ability to operate independently and efficiently.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development.

This hypothesis was also rejected. The regression analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development. The results indicate that as the level of autonomy granted to local governments increases, there is a corresponding improvement in grassroots development outcomes. This finding underscores the critical role that local government autonomy plays in fostering development at the community level.

**Hypothesis 3:** Challenges do not significantly affect local government autonomy. The findings led to the rejection of this hypothesis as well. The analysis revealed that several challenges, including interference from state governments and the lack of financial independence, significantly hinder the effective autonomy of local governments. These challenges undermine the ability of local governments to execute their mandates effectively and to contribute meaningfully to grassroots development.

The study underscores a moderate-to-strong positive relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos State. The findings highlight that administrative and financial independence significantly enhance service delivery in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. The study's findings that emphasize the positive relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development align closely with Decentralization Theory, which posits that the delegation of administrative and financial powers to local governments enhances responsiveness and accountability. Decentralization advocates for the empowerment of local governments to manage resources and deliver services effectively at the grassroots level. The study's assertion that administrative and financial independence improve service delivery in sectors like healthcare, education, and infrastructure directly ties to the decentralized decision-making process, where local governments have the flexibility to cater to the specific needs of their communities (Ribot, 2002). Furthermore, the study's recognition of persistent interference from state governments as a limitation aligns with the central idea of Decentralization Theory—that excessive centralization of power and decision-making by state governments can stifle local governance efforts, undermining the capacity of local authorities to address local needs effectively.

Also, the finding that local government autonomy enhances service delivery in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure is also closely linked to Participatory Governance Theory, which stresses the importance of local participation in governance processes. When local governments are granted autonomy, it encourages greater citizen involvement in decision-making, leading to more tailored and effective policies that resonate with community needs. The administrative independence that the study highlights facilitates better governance by fostering local community participation in the planning and implementation of development initiatives (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007). The study also reflects the essence of Participatory Governance by suggesting that strengthening local government autonomy would lead to more effective grassroots development. This idea echoes the principle of enabling local populations to have greater control over their development, reinforcing the idea that participatory governance is key to achieving sustainable development. Persistent interference from state governments limits the full realization of local government autonomy, undermining efforts to achieve sustainable grassroots development. These results align with prior studies, including Adegboye et al. (2021) and Olaoye (2020), which emphasize the need for greater independence, financial transparency, and reduced state intervention in local governance. In conclusion, strengthening local government autonomy in Lagos is essential for promoting sustainable grassroots development. Future studies could investigate sector-specific impacts and explore comparative autonomy dynamics across other states in Nigeria.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between local government autonomy and grassroots development in Lagos State, focusing on political, administrative, and financial independence. The study also explored the challenges limiting autonomy and assessed how autonomy impacts critical development areas such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Based on data analysis from 385 respondents across selected LGAs, the study established several key findings. A significant majority of respondents (88.05%) agreed that local governments possess moderate political autonomy, with the ability to make independent decisions. Similarly, financial autonomy was recognized, with 86.24% of respondents acknowledging budgetary control. However, 66.50% highlighted state government interference as a major limitation. Local government autonomy was found to positively influence grassroots development, particularly in education (89.10%), healthcare (87.27%), and infrastructure (86.75%). Regression analysis further confirmed a significant positive relationship, with autonomy explaining 47.9% of the variance in grassroots development ( $R^2 = 0.479$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Key challenges identified included state government interference (70.13%), insufficient financial resources (64.94%), and mismanagement of funds (51.95%).

This study contributes to the understanding of local governance in Nigeria by providing empirical evidence on the critical role of autonomy in driving grassroots development. Notable contributions include highlighting the importance of financial and administrative independence for effective governance, identifying specific challenges that limit autonomy, and demonstrating the measurable impact of autonomy on key development sectors. These findings add valuable insights to the literature on governance and development. Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. Firstly, State governments should minimize interference in local budgets by enacting legislation that clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of local governments, ensuring they have autonomy over their budgets and development initiatives. This could include establishing clear guidelines for financial transfers to local governments, setting timelines for budget approvals, and giving local governments full control over resource allocation for key sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Additionally, state governments should support the devolution of power by committing to decentralization policies that align with national frameworks for local autonomy. This would help reduce bottlenecks in service delivery and improve governance by providing training for local government officials on how to manage increased responsibilities effectively. To promote transparency, state governments should establish independent audit bodies at the local level to ensure funds are utilized efficiently, and collaboration between state and local authorities in oversight processes can enhance accountability and reduce corruption.

Local governments, on the other hand, should invest in training and capacity building to address skill gaps and ensure personnel are equipped to manage development projects effectively. Establishing partnerships with higher educational institutions and capacity-building organizations would facilitate training in governance, financial management, and service delivery. Moreover, local governments must strengthen financial oversight and transparency by establishing or enhancing financial management committees to oversee fund usage and ensure compliance with regulations. The introduction of public financial management software can improve tracking and reporting of budget allocations, expenditures, and revenue generation. Local councils should also establish participatory budgeting platforms, hold regular town hall meetings, and create advisory boards with representatives from various community sectors to ensure that development projects align with community needs. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have an important role to play in advocating for policy reform to safeguard local government autonomy. NGOs should work with legal experts and policymakers to push for constitutional reforms that devolve powers and resources to local governments. They can also partner with local governments to build governance capacity and enhance administrative capabilities. NGOs should empower communities to take part in decision-making processes through training workshops on participatory governance. Additionally, NGOs can promote transparency and accountability by helping local governments set up accountability monitoring systems, such as mobile apps or online platforms, where citizens can report corruption or mismanagement. Community leaders and citizens should be encouraged to take an active role in governance by regularly participating in public forums and community consultations. Civic education campaigns can inform residents about their rights and responsibilities, fostering a culture of active civic engagement. Community



leaders should facilitate grassroots-driven development by organizing local committees to monitor and evaluate the implementation of development projects, ensuring that community needs are effectively addressed.

To scale successful local governance practices, several mechanisms should be put in place. First, regional knowledge-sharing platforms can be established to allow local governments to exchange successful practices, challenges, and strategies for strengthening autonomy and promoting grassroots development. Peer learning initiatives, where successful local governments mentor others, would encourage the replication of effective governance models. Second, pilot programs can be launched in states with successful local governance models to demonstrate the benefits of reduced state interference and improved service delivery. These programs should include impact assessments to ensure that successful strategies can be adopted by other regions. Third, states can establish collaborative partnerships between local governments, civil society organizations, and international development partners to leverage financial and technical resources, implementing local governance reforms in underperforming regions. Additionally, a national decentralization support fund could provide grants to local governments committed to reforms, training, and infrastructure improvements. The fund should have transparent allocation guidelines to ensure resources are used effectively. Finally, robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks should be set up at both the state and national levels to track decentralization efforts, holding local governments accountable and ensuring that lessons learned from successful practices can be applied across regions.

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