



Local Government Autonomy and Grassroots Development: Exploring Availability of Funds for Development Initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States

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ABSTRACT

Local governments as a bureaucratic institution are constitutionally created to bring government closer to the people and to drive grassroots development through provision of basic services, infrastructure and local planning. Despite this, local government autonomy has not yielded expected result as a result of the problem of fiscal federalism. So, the specific purpose of this research was to examine the effect of local government autonomy on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. The study was established through survey research design and combination of elite theory and cancerous democratic theory. The population for this study (17,044) included the residents of local government areas in both Delta and Bayelsa States. Taro Yamane formula for sample size was used to arrive at 381 from whence 376 became the sample that produce the study. The ANOVA results ($F = 0.028$, $p = 0.883$) and the p -value for the autonomy variable ($p = 0.883$) indicate that the model is not statistically significant. Thus, we found that local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. In conclusion, it is clear that despite some level of independence, local governments remain financially constrained due to overreliance on federal and state allocations, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and weak internal revenue structures. This suggests that autonomy alone is insufficient to guarantee adequate funding for development projects. The study recommended that there is need for reforming the disbursement process and strengthening internal revenue generation to cater for local needs in Bayelsa and Delta States.

Keywords: *Cancerous Democratic Theory, Corruption, Local Government, Local Government Autonomy, Grassroots Development*

INTRODUCTION

Fiscal federalism which is the financial relationship between federal government and the regional or local government is an important aspect of the Nigerian politics. Corroborating this, extant literature adds fiscal federalism remains an important subject in the policy equation of many developing and developed countries (Ewetan, 2012). Yet, this area is perhaps the most troubled as public organisations and Nigerian local governments in particular suffer acute erosion of autonomy herein seen as a typology of corruption. Corruption a negative phenomenon which is ubiquitous (Chioke, 2020a) and multifaceted (Chioke, 2026) has often hindered the availability of funds for development initiatives in many States in Southsouth Nigeria, especially Bayelsa and Delta states. Therefore, empirical evidence predicate that if public bureaucracy in Nigeria is not purged of corrupt practices it will not be able to drive the needed change for democratic consolidation (Akpan & Eyo, 2018) in Nigeria. Local governments as a bureaucratic institution are constitutionally created to bring government closer to the people and to drive grassroots development through provision of basic services, infrastructure and local planning. Over time in Nigeria States like Bayelsa and Delta States, local government autonomy has been weakened by fiscal centralization, state control of local revenues, appointment or removal of local officials, interference in personnel and administration, and weak legal protections. This erosion may have direct consequences on the capacity of local governments to plan, fund and deliver services that affect livelihoods at the grassroots. For the fact that effective policy execution is critical to attaining Nigeria's development goals (Chioke 2025) at the grassroots, understanding how reduced autonomy affects grassroots development outcomes in

Bayelsa and Delta, two oil-producing, ecologically sensitive states with significant local governance challenges, will inform policy reforms and for stronger decentralization and improved local development.

Local governments are essential for the growth and development of grassroots communities because they are the administrative bodies closest to the people (Abah, 2023; Etebom & Wijaya, 2022). They understand the unique needs and challenges of their communities and are in a prime position to address them effectively (Twaweza, 2024). The primary objective of local governments is to provide essential services such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and sanitation to their constituents. In federal systems, local government autonomy is vital for ensuring that these bodies can efficiently carry out their mandate without interference from higher levels of government (Abati & Kugbayi, 2020). Local government autonomy refers to the ability of local councils to make decisions, raise revenue, and implement policies independently (Okorie, Obasi, Nwosu, Chukwu, Akanu & Ngwuta, 2023). However, elite and cancerous democratic theories underscore the fact that the Nigerian state is passing through structural issues undermining her practice of democracy and federalism. Triangulating these theories therefore provides a robust explanatory framework for examining and understanding why local governments struggle to translate constitutional autonomy into tangible development outcomes.

Nigeria local government is a failed public bureaucracy asking for the masses' collective attention in form of revitalization (Chioke, 2022) for the purposes of efficient service delivery through the instrumentality of institutional rebirth sequel to elite oriented policy and cancerous democratic elements. For this reason, local governments in Nigeria, particularly in Bayelsa and Delta States, are often envisioned as autonomous entities capable of addressing the unique needs and challenges within their communities. Theoretically, these local governments play a crucial role in grassroots development, as they are ideally positioned to provide essential services such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, and sanitation (Abah, 2023; Twaweza, 2024). It has been argued that an increase in autonomy could empower local councils to make independent decisions, raise revenue, and implement policies tailored to their constituents' needs, potentially promoting sustainable development (Okorie, et al, 2023) through availability of funds for development administration at underdeveloped states of the Southsouth geopolitical zone. Be that as it may, the challenge before the researcher is to unravel the effect that local government autonomy has on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. To this effect, the specific objective of this study is to examine the effect of local government autonomy on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. To interrogate this, the researchers became interested in providing answers to this question: What effect does local government autonomy have on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States? Focusing on local government areas in Bayelsa State and Delta State, this objective was pursued through survey research method.

Hypothesis

1. H01: Local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Federalism is a process and an established structure of governance that develops and encourage unity in diversity on the basis of mutual agreement by constitutionally uniting politically stratified and disjointed units into a limited, but encompassing political system known as a federation (Chioke, 2021). Significantly, Gberevbie and Mukoro (2023) asserted that the perception of local government as the third tier of authority in Nigeria is fundamentally rooted in its role as the level of governance closest to the people. It is viewed as the institutional framework through which grassroots participation, democratic inclusion, and community development are promoted. Nissen (2021) emphasizes that the term "local" typically refers to spatial conditions, specifically the geographical areas that are closest to individuals in their daily lives. This contrasts with broader contexts such as national or global levels, which are more distant from people's immediate surroundings.

Local governments in Nigeria are faced by several problems (Chioke, Umeokafor & Mbamalu, 2020) which includes the erosion of autonomy. In fact, it is crystal clear that Nigerian local governments have thus underperformed their functions (Ogunnubi, 2022), because the system is confronted by multifaceted issues (Abasili, Chioke & Udeoba, 2023; Anayochukwu & Ani, 2021) negating fiscal federalism

and funding availability for local spending to development programs at the grassroots of Bayelsa and Delta States of Nigeria. Local government, as defined by Ndreul (2016), refers to a set of governmental bodies that are elected by the people to serve their communities. These bodies play a crucial role in the governance of local areas, embodying a structure that combines administrative, legislative, and executive functions. Essentially, local governments are empowered to make decisions and implement policies that directly affect the lives of the residents within their jurisdiction. In fact, literature posits that the practice of local government in Nigeria has been shown to be dependent on decentralization, localized socio-economic development, democratic involvement, and bringing the government closer to the people (Alao, et al. 2015) through the instrumentality of local government autonomy. But the question is: to what extent has this been achieved in Nigeria as regards funding development policies in oil producing states of Nigeria? This puzzle reinforces the research question: *What effect does local government autonomy have on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States?* While examining political, fiscal and administrative decentralisation in Nigeria, Okojie (2009) found that even though decentralisation is entrenched in the constitution of Nigeria, the expected benefits for local government service delivery were yet unachieved.

Empirical Literature Review

Ibe, Ibrahim, Sada, and Ezenwajiobi (2024) analyzed the implications of local government autonomy for governance and development in Nigeria. Utilizing a content analysis methodology, the study found that local governments have largely failed to meet their foundational objectives due to excessive fiscal and political control exerted by state governments, as established by the 1999 Constitution. This control has hampered local development. Emmanuel (2024) conducted a thorough examination of the complexities surrounding financial management and control within local government systems in Nigeria. The study emphasizes the importance of effective financial management as a fundamental aspect of public governance, particularly at the local level, where it plays a critical role in executing projects and delivering quality services to the community. The researcher identified several challenges impeding the efficient management of finances in local governments, notably the misappropriation of funds by local government employees. These employees often collect revenue but fail to remit it to the councils' coffers, undermining the financial integrity of local governments.

The study by Nwokike and Chidolue (2021) examined the effectiveness of the local government system in service delivery in Anambra State between 2014 and 2021. Specifically, it investigated the impact of the caretaker committee system on service delivery and assessed whether local governments serve as a platform for the development of democratic values. Using a survey design, data were collected from a sample of 400 respondents drawn from a population of 530,628, and analyzed using simple percentages and chi-square statistics at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the persistent use of caretaker committees negatively affected service delivery, particularly in the provision and maintenance of primary education and healthcare facilities. However, the study also found that local governments contributed positively to the promotion of democratic values. Based on these findings, the authors recommended the removal of excessive state control over local governments, as stipulated in the 1999 Constitution, to enhance their autonomy and effectiveness. They also emphasized the need to sustain the role of local governments as training grounds for democratic leadership.

Aderogba and Aderogba (2023) examined the challenges faced by local governments in Nigeria, focusing on the critical need for autonomy to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency. The authors highlight that local governments currently struggle with productivity due to insufficient financial, administrative, and political autonomy. They argue for an examination of these deficiencies and propose a Community Participation Model as a solution to strengthen local government performance. Utilizing descriptive analysis and the theoretical framework of democratic participation, the study illustrates how involving communities in governance can drive the achievement of autonomy objectives.

Gap in Literature

The issue of local government autonomy in Nigeria raises critical concerns regarding its implications for grassroots development. Given that past studies have interrogated this from different angle, this research seeks to assess how local government autonomy has influenced availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on elite theory and cancerous democratic theory.

Elite Theory

The theory that informed our discussion of local government autonomy on grassroots development is elite theory. This theoretical framework posits that a small group of individuals, often referred to as elites, hold significant power and influence over decision-making processes in society. These elites may include political leaders, business figures, and other influential members of the community who can shape policies and outcomes in their favor. In the context of local government autonomy, elite theory highlights how the concentration of power among a few can undermine democratic governance and the principles of decentralization. The roots of elite theory can be traced back to the works of Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels, who are recognized as the cofounders of the Italian school of elitism (Damele & Campos, 2022; Mariotti, 2022). Their contributions laid the groundwork for understanding the mechanics of power and influence within political systems.

Vilfredo Pareto posited that elite class can be grouped into the governing elites and non-governing elites (Chioke, 2020b). Elite theory reflects elite values and serves elite ends (Okeke, 2001), abandoning local needs by withholding funds for grassroots development. This leads to rancour, indifference and a poorly informed populace which then creates leeway for undemocratic activities by state actors that are known for affecting the public (Chioke, 2024a). With diminished autonomy, local governments often become dependent on state or federal funding for their operations and projects. This dependency can result in inequitable resource allocation, where funds are directed towards initiatives that serve elite interests rather than addressing the pressing needs of local communities. In Bayelsa and Delta States, this could mean that resources are funneled into high-profile projects that have little impact on grassroots development, exacerbating issues such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and social inequality. The prioritization of elite-driven agenda often leaves crucial community needs unmet, stunting local development efforts.

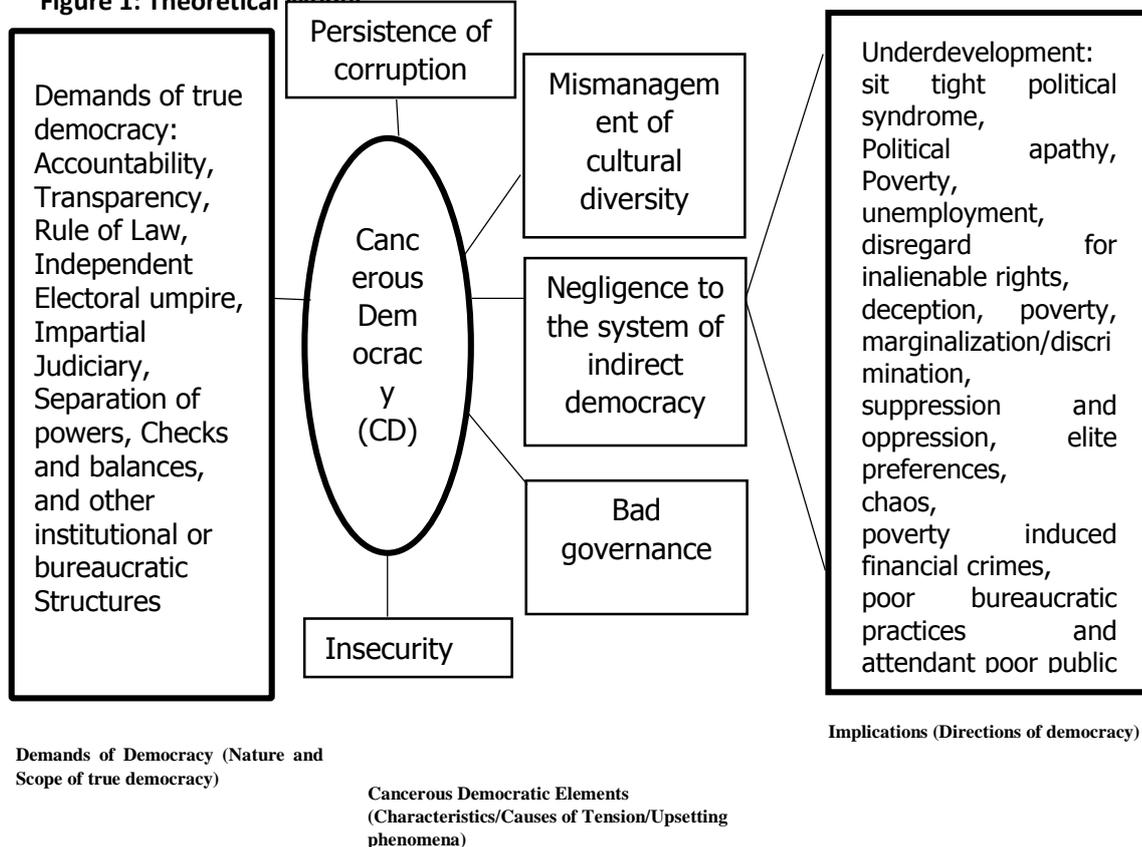
Application of the theory to the Study

The erosion of local government autonomy in Bayelsa and Delta States has significant implications for grassroots development. By applying elite theory, this study highlights the intricate dynamics of power and influence that shape local governance. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for identifying strategies to restore local government autonomy and enhance the effectiveness of grassroots development initiatives. Empowering local governments and ensuring their autonomy is essential for fostering sustainable development that reflects the true needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. Restoring this autonomy will not only enhance local governance but also promote inclusivity, accountability, and responsiveness, ultimately leading to better development outcomes at the grassroots level.

Cancerous Democratic Theory (CDT)

To drive home our point, this study further adopts cancerous democracy theory propounded by Chioke (2024a) in his paper, "Nigeria's democracy: a cancer in disguise." This theory is as a result of his attempt to critically explore systemic issues negatively affecting governance in Africa and Nigeria in particular (Chioke, Sule, Enabunene, Agbo & Onoyemeakpo, 2026). This theory sees contemporary political gladiators in Africa, especially Nigeria as a cancer in the human body infesting the country at all levels of governance with obnoxious governance practices that derail good governance (Chioke, 2024a). This no doubt leads to lack of funding for local councils and grassroots underdevelopment. Examining democratic governance in Nigeria, Chioke (2024a) analytically demonstrated the critical ideology of the theory in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Theoretical Model



Source: Chioke (2024) Nigeria’s Democracy: A cancer in disguise

Cancerous democracy theory is an attempt to explain the behavior of Nigerian politicians, public policy implementers and their cronies that greatly war against the ideals of democracy (Chioke, 2024) making grassroots development initiatives practically impossible. Closely examined, the above upsetting phenomena/cancerous democratic factors are possible political factors engineering the present incompatibility of local government autonomy and grassroots development in Nigeria’s federating units, with particular reference to Bayelsa and Delta States.

Tenets/Assumptions

According to Anonymous (2024a, p.273), “The theory is anchored on these assumptions:

1. Contemporary political gladiators in third-world countries are significant in their countries’ political leadership, but in most instances, their actions, inactions, and reactions socialize their mentees in the political cum bureaucratic spheres and the general public with illegality.

2. Contemporary political gladiators in third-world countries operate both domestic and foreign policies inimical to movement from an underdeveloped/stagnated state to a problem-solving or sustainably developed state.
3. Allocations of values and public appointments are based on patronage and cronyism, and the politics of race (ethnicity).
4. Where laws do not apply and have to a great extent failed to control the activities of political actors and their agents, it becomes harder to tame security threats.
5. Ruling and non-ruling elites adopt cult of personality - the politics of selfglorification even when they are completely bereft of concrete ideas to pilot the state as situation demands.
6. Democracy is spearheaded by the politically, socioeconomically, and technologically ignorant class.
7. The state's focus is on political gladiators' perceptions of what democracy should be and not on international best practices or objective facts through manipulation, repression, propaganda, and suppression of dissent."

Relevance of the Theory to the Study

This theory provides a critical framework for analyzing the political factors that cause grassroots underdevelopment despite the existing fiscal autonomy. This theory argues that political leadership in Africa especially Nigeria is characterized by systemic corruption, patronage politics, and democratic inefficiencies, which contribute to governance failures and deteriorating living conditions (Chioke, et al, 2026). CDT's idea that political actors pursue policies that sustain underdevelopment instead of transformative governance align with the focus as well as the findings of this research in Bayelsa and Delta States. The acceptance of the null hypothesis (Local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States) suggests that fiscal decentralization in Nigerian states in the Niger Delta, particularly Bayelsa and Delta States often prioritize political control over grassroots development initiatives. Arising from this, fiscal centralization and institutional interference by state-level authorities seriously limit the capacity of local governments to act as agents of local development.

Also, the theory's claim that political gladiators shape democratic practice according to their own needs and ideas rather than international best practices is particularly relevant to the Nigerian decentralization example. Although, it could be argued that decentralization globally aims to promote accountability, citizen participation, and efficient resource allocation, the manipulation of institutional arrangements through corrupt procedures like patronage and suppression of dissent could prevent these objectives from being realized in practice at the grassroots of Bayelsa and Delta States, Nigeria. Relevant literature credence this, stating that the mismanagement of resources and lack of accountability in governance weaken public institutions, promote inefficiency in service delivery, and create a governance vacuum (Adamaagashi, Awakessien & Awakessien, 2024; Chioke, 2023 & 2024b) which leads to lack of funding. Based on these premises, CDT is applicable to this current survey.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey approach to collect quantitative data from respondents in Bayelsa and Delta States. Convenience sampling technique which is used due to proximity and ease of access of research participants (Chioke, Abasili, Okeke, Mbamalu, Ibe, & Odidika, 2023) was adopted selected for selecting the study's respondents. The justification is that, "convenience sampling method is a non-probability sampling where units are selected for inclusion in the sample because they are the easiest for the researcher to access (Nikolopoulou, 2023)." The population for this study included the residents of local government areas who are council staff in both Delta and Bayelsa States, which are integral to understanding the effects of the erosion of local government autonomy on grassroots development. Delta State has a total population of 11,151 council staff as of 2025. Bayelsa State has a total population of 5,892 staff, distributed across its eight Local Government Areas (LGAs). Combined Population of Delta and Bayelsa States: 17,043. Taro Yamane Formula for Sample Size was used to arrive at 381 sample size. The

analysis of data collected from this study employed two primary statistical methods: Descriptive Statistics and Simple Regression Analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

At this point, the demographic profile of respondents are analytically portrayed as follows:

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	172	45.7
	Female	204	54.3
Age	18-30	91	24.2
	31-40	113	30.1
	41-50	79	21.0
	51 and above	93	24.7
Educational Qualification	SSCE	67	17.8
	Diploma/NCE	91	24.2
	Bachelor's Degree	142	37.8
	Postgraduate	76	20.2

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The demographic profile of respondents provides an overview of their characteristics in terms of gender, age, and educational qualification. The gender distribution shows a slight dominance of females, who constitute 54.3% of the respondents, while 45.7% are males. Regarding age, the distribution is relatively balanced, with 24.2% of respondents aged between 18–30 years, 30.1% between 31–40 years, 21.0% between 41–50 years, and 24.7% aged 51 years and above. In terms of educational qualification, a large proportion (37.8%) of respondents possess a Bachelor's Degree, followed by 24.2% with Diploma/NCE, 20.2% holding Postgraduate qualifications, and 17.8% with SSCE. This indicates that the respondents are generally well educated.

Research Question 1: What effect does local government autonomy have on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States? Table number 2 shows the analyses of substantive data collected to examine the above research question.

Table 2: Respondents' Opinions on Local Government Autonomy and Funding Availability

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total
1	Local governments have the freedom to make independent decisions on financial matters.	20 (5.3%)	20 (5.3%)	5 (1.3%)	160 (42.6%)	171 (45.5%)	376 (100%)
2	Autonomy allows local governments to plan their development projects without state interference.	18 (4.8%)	18 (4.8%)	6 (1.6%)	162 (43.1%)	172 (45.7%)	376 (100%)

S/N	Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total
3	Autonomous local governments can prioritize funding for local needs.	22 (5.9%)	20 (5.3%)	4 (1.1%)	160 (42.6%)	170 (45.2%)	376 (100%)
4	Autonomy improves transparency and accountability in financial decisions.	20 (5.3%)	22 (5.9%)	5 (1.3%)	162 (43.1%)	167 (44.4%)	376 (100%)
5	Local governments receive adequate funds for development projects.	18 (4.8%)	20 (5.3%)	5 (1.3%)	160 (42.6%)	173 (46.0%)	376 (100%)
6	Funds are allocated and released on time for local development projects.	20 (5.3%)	18 (4.8%)	6 (1.6%)	162 (43.1%)	170 (45.2%)	376 (100%)
7	Availability of funds affects the timely completion of projects.	22 (5.9%)	20 (5.3%)	4 (1.1%)	160 (42.6%)	170 (45.2%)	376 (100%)
8	Financial mismanagement reduces the impact of funds on local development.	18 (4.8%)	18 (4.8%)	5 (1.3%)	162 (43.1%)	173 (46.0%)	376 (100%)
	Total	158 (5.3%)	156 (5.2%)	40 (1.3%)	1,288 (42.8%)	1,366 (45.4%)	3,008 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2026

Note: Figures in Parenthesis are percentages

Table 2 indicates that on the average, 5.3 percent of the respondents strongly agreed on all the statements of items under research question one. In addition, 5.2 percent agreed, 1.3 percent were indifferent, 42.8 percent disagreed, while 45.4 percent strongly disagreed.

Test of Hypothesis

The research hypothesis was tested using regression analysis

Regression Analysis for Research Hypothesis One

H0₁: Local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States.

Metric	Value
Regression Equation	= 2.0209 + -0.1134
Correlation	-0.1169
R Square	0.0137

Metric	Value
Standard Error	0.0250
F-Value	0.0277
Probability (F-Value)	0.8831

ANOVA

Source	df	Sum of Squares(SS)	Mean Sum of Squares (MS)	F-Value	Probability (F-Value)
Regression	1	0.0000	0.0000	0.0277	0.8831
Residual	2	0.0012	0.0006		
Total	3	0.0013			

Coefficients Table

Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%
Intercept	2.0209	1.2441	1.6244	0.2458	-3.3321
Local ... Variable	-0.1134	0.6810	-0.1665	0.8831	-3.0436

The correlation coefficient ($r = -0.117$) indicates a very weak negative relationship between local government autonomy and the availability of funds. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.014$) suggests that only 1.4% of the variation in funding availability is explained by local government autonomy. The ANOVA results ($F = 0.028$, $p = 0.883$) and the p-value for the autonomy variable ($p = 0.883$) indicate that the model is not statistically significant. This means that changes in local government autonomy do not significantly predict changes in funding availability.

Based on these results, the null hypothesis (H_0) is retained. Local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. This suggests that other factors, rather than autonomy, may influence the funding levels of local governments.

Discussion of Findings

The results from research hypothesis indicate a negative relationship between local government autonomy and the availability of funds for development initiatives ($r = -0.117$, $R^2 = 0.014$, $p = 0.883$). The regression coefficient (-0.1134) further confirms that changes in local government autonomy have a negligible negative effect on funding availability. The ANOVA results ($F = 0.028$, $p = 0.883$) suggest that the model is not statistically significant, meaning that autonomy does not significantly predict funding outcomes. Although literature posits that arising from decentralization in Nigeria, local governments are empowered to exercise certain powers and responsibilities in areas relating to grassroots development, local democracy and service delivery (Ogunnubi, 2022); this research reveal that the local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development plans in the study location.

Imperatively, a greater comprehension of the results of this research could be obtained by triangulating elite theory and cancerous democracy theory. While cancerous democratic theory describes how this control weakens the democratic system in Nigeria, elite theory explains who controls resources and power. In this way, structural conditions that progressively infect democratic institutions at the grassroots of Bayelsa and Delta States are created by political elites' control over fiscal mechanisms. Local governments become more administratively dependent and financially constrained when elites seize

control of fiscal channels and decision-making processes, undermining their capacity to successfully carry out development projects. The respondents' opinions that financial mismanagement lessens the impact of development funding and that the availability of cash influences the timely completion of projects are examples of this institutional distortion. These issues negatively affect the practice of democracy and true federalism in Nigeria.

Additionally, the politics of decentralization in many African democracies is demonstrated by the convergence of these theoretical ideologies. Although decentralization is supposed to improve accountability, participation, and effective resource distribution, institutional deterioration and elite capture can turn it into a system that just replicates centralized power at a different administrative level. The prerequisites outlined by cancerous democratic theory are reinforced in the Nigerian context by the persistence of elite control in state-local budgetary relations, which undermines the accountability mechanisms that ought to precede democratic decentralization and birth an egalitarian society. On the contrary, third-world governments resort to authoritarian tactics, restricting fundamental human rights (Mbanaso & Korie, 2014) and neglecting core responsibilities of a responsive leadership. The findings of this research therefore suggest that the dearth of fiscal autonomy and funding availability for local governments is not just an administrative problem but an indication of elite domination and democratic dysfunction within Nigeria – a problem which appears to engulf federating units including Bayelsa and Delta States.

These findings as indicated in Table 1 imply that despite the nominal autonomy granted to local governments, the actual capacity to generate or access sufficient funds remains constrained. Several structural factors may explain this outcome. First, most local governments remain heavily dependent on statutory allocations from state and federal governments, which limits financial independence and flexibility. Second, bureaucratic bottlenecks in fund disbursement delay project execution, undermining the potential benefits of autonomy. Third, weak internal revenue generation mechanisms, coupled with ineffective tax collection systems, reduce the ability of local governments to mobilize funds internally. These observations are consistent with prior studies emphasizing the financial vulnerability of local governments in Nigeria and the resulting limitations on development planning and service delivery (Ibe et al., 2024; Olujimi, 2024; Okorie et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

The results showed that local government autonomy has no statistically significant effect on funding availability. Local government autonomy did not significantly improve access to development funding. This is not unconnected with the influence of the political elites of fiscal federalism in Nigeria. In respect of this, our findings agree with Chioke (2024) who observed that democracy is contradicted by the fundamental idea of elitism. It then suffices to say that political power as perceived by elite theory is concentrated in the hands of few persons or groups in a society (Jibrin, 2014).

The study examined the effect of local government autonomy on governance effectiveness in Bayelsa and Delta States, focusing on funding availability, financial management, community perception of governance, and community participation. The analysis of the research hypotheses revealed a nuanced understanding of the role of autonomy in local governance. Firstly, the study found that local government autonomy does not significantly influence funding availability for development initiatives. Impliedly, this shows that there are longstanding political and structural problems in Nigeria (Chioke, et al, 2026) negating funding of development initiatives at the grassroots of several states in Nigeria. In conclusion, it is clear that despite some level of independence, local governments remain financially constrained due to overreliance on federal and state allocations, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and weak internal revenue structures. This suggests that autonomy alone is insufficient to guarantee adequate funding for development projects. Based on the result - Local government autonomy has no significant effect on the availability of funds for development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States; we thus recommended that there is need for reforming the disbursement process and strengthening internal revenue generation to cater for local needs in Bayelsa and Delta States.

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