

## **Local Government and Grassroots Political Participation: Analysis of Isi Uzo Local Government Area, Enugu State Nigeria, 1999 to 2019**

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### **Abstract**

*Every level of government is constitutionally required to provide essential services to all citizens within their jurisdiction, and this could be satisfactorily achieved through mechanisms that insure citizen participation. Hence, grassroots political participation in local government's level affairs presupposes direct contact with the people to allow them to be actively involved in initiating and innovating measures that leave beneficial impact. This reality, stirred the thought to examine the extent to which local government administrations particularly that of Isi Uzo Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria encourages grassroots political participation in the current democratic dispensation (1999 and 2019). David Easton's System theory, which posits that the political system is the basic unit of analysis in understanding the dynamic interactions and effects of all political actors, was adopted as theoretical framework. According to the theory there is an implicit interdependence between the system and its environment and a change in one affects the others. The data for the study were collected using interview, observations, focus group discussions (FGD) and questionnaires as primary source, while textbooks, journals, internet resources are the secondary source. The necessary data were analyzed with content analyses and T-test statistical analyses. The study found out that people do not participate effectively in governance in Isi Uzo LGA. The researcher however recommended credible elections at the grassroots and community involvement in governmental decision making process.*

**Keywords:** Isi Uzo Local Government Area, grassroots, political participation, governance, democracy

## Introduction

Citizen political participation in grassroots governance is the bedrock of every democracy. Participation is a cardinal principle in government. It becomes even more important when the local government is involved. This is primarily because the local government is the first contact ordinary people have with the government. For this obvious reason, it is imperative for the citizens to be involved in one way or the other in the decision making process of the local government. According to Egbefo (2015), no democracy can become dynamic, acceptable and sustainable if the system of governance at the grassroots level is not people oriented, friendly, participatory and accountable.

The origin of local government administration in Nigeria could be traced to the colonial rule. Thereafter, during the early post-independence era, the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria led to the emergence of various types of local governments, which were practiced by different regimes in Nigeria. According to Ovaga (2012), the federal system of government adopted after independence further confirmed these differences, when it provided that each of the then four regions was responsible for the structure, legislation and operation of its local government councils. That was why between 1967 and 1970, the names given to local governments were different in all regions or states. In the north, the local government was then called Local Authority, while it was called Local Government in the west, and in the east, it was known as District Council. During this period, the traditional rulers had overwhelming influence on these grassroots governments.

The differences in the local government administration among the regions in Nigeria continued until the federal military government in 1976 established a uniform and single-tier system of government throughout the country. This reform was later entrenched in the 1979 constitution, thereby giving it a full legal backing, and equally recognized it as a third-tier of government after federal and state governments. The uniformity is in the area of functions, structure, funding and management. Following the flaws in the 1979 constitution in terms of local government autonomy, the Dasuki Report of 1984 tried to address the issue properly. According to the Report, local governments' share of the Federation Account was increased from 10 per cent to 15 per cent and later to 20 per cent (Okoli, 1989: 35).

Essentially, the essence of local government in Nigeria is therefore to give the broad mass of Nigerians the opportunity to get involved in duties and privileges of the democratic process and thereby establish a new political order capable of ensuring; Justice, creating awareness and political mobilization, and also creating opportunity for the people to participate in the decision making process and chart a new course for a new social and equitable distribution of national resources and opportunities.

In Enugu State there were various strategies adopted in local governance between 1999 to 2007; 2007 to 2015 and 2015 to 2019 respectively. In the former, local governance was further

decentralized to 56 development areas to encourage development and involve grassroots in governance. In the latter, councils were constituted to their original state of 17 federal government established local governments. Elections were held periodically during this time except during the first two years of Hon Ugwuanyi's administration (2015-2017) when caretakers were appointed.

Furthermore, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria places the local government authorities under the influence of the state governments which concedes limited autonomy to this tier of government. Thus, the Nigerian Local Government system which is the third tier of government appears to have no interactive links with the community for which it was designed and created. This has made so many people to wonder if there is grassroots democracy in Nigeria. Though the government is located at the local level, it gives the impression that it is run by elites who are alienated from the people (Oruonye 2013). Thus the local government and the communities that ought to be partners in progress appear to be operating at parallel lines. In view of these, this study examines the degree to which Isi Uzo Local Government of Enugu State Nigeria has encouraged grassroots political participation during the period under study.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

This study adopts David Easton's System Analysis as the theoretical framework. David Easton in this theory proposes the political system as the most suitable unit of analysis of political life. All systems have certain properties in common. There is structural interdependence and interrelatedness which makes a change in one part affect the performance of the other either functionally or dysfunctionally.

According to Easton (1953:129) the political system consists of all interacting elements which contribute to the authoritative allocation of values for a society. He posits that political life will be understood by viewing each of its aspect piecemeal. An examination of institutions like political parties, interest groups, government and voting are to be made. The nature and consequences of such political practices as manipulation, propaganda and violence and revealing the structures within which these practices occur is to be made also. By combining the results, a rough picture of what happens in any self-contained political unit is obtained. A discovery that each part of the larger political environment is related to the other will be made. Furthermore, Easton (1957) maintains that what keep the political system going are inputs of various kinds. These inputs are converted by the process of the system into output and these in turn have consequences for the system and the environment in which the system exists.

According to him, political life concerns all activities that significantly influence the formation and implementation of authoritative policies for a society. He further defined politics as authoritative allocation of values in the society Eminue (2001). To him the authoritative allocation of values for a society is then what distinguishes a political system in an environment. The political system resembles a vast perpetual conversion process or a conversion machine which takes the inputs of

demands and support from the environment in which it is embedded and produces outputs in form of policies and decisions, which in turn, through the feedback process, influence the supportive sentiments that members express towards the system and the kind of demand they subsequently make. The conversion process moves toward the authorities who by virtue of their status in all systems have the special responsibility for converting these demands made by members into output.

Demands refers to articulated contributions which are directed to the political system and which tend to propose for some kind of government attention on issues while support is the ways in which individuals or groups oriented themselves favourably towards the political system mostly through socialization and politicization to reduce the rate of apathy and indifference in the political system (Nekabiri 2000). In particular, it refers to those actions which act as expression of solidarity with the norms, values or basic rules of the political system.

Outputs on the other hand can be seen within the context of political transactions which are initiated by or within the political system or the environment. Implicit in this explanation of output is the notion of feedback mechanism. The feedback is a conceptual schematic to show that there is a regularized pattern of interaction which revolves around the pattern of output and response to such output by the environment on a regular basis. Put differently, the feedback is designed to be a channel of communication between the political system and the environment in terms of the effect of political decisions on the environment of the political system.

The bane of local government as a grassroots institution is lack of harmony among other component parts of that government especially the people at the environment. To enhance effective political participation at the grassroots which involves; choice of leaders, otherwise known as voting in a free, fair and credible election, citizens' involvement in decision making and policy formulations, and identification and monitoring of projects in the community, systems theory approach must be in place to achieve this. The process of input and output from the political system carries the people in the political environment along in decisions that bothers them thereby encouraging political participation.

### **Research Methodology**

Survey design and document review on grassroots political participation in Isi Uzo Local Government Area, from 1999 to 2019 were taken. Secondary and primary sources of data collection were adopted for the study. Textbooks, journals and other periodicals were used for secondary data gathering. Data were obtained primarily through, personal observation, interview, questionnaire and focused group discussions (FGD) from political stakeholders, residents and indigenes of Isi Uzo Local Government Area. The data obtained were used descriptively on the variables studied.

### **Population**

The population of the study consists of residents and indigenes of Isi Uzo Local Government with a population of 200,600 (Source, NBS 2016).

### **Sample Size and Technique**

The sample size was determined using statistical method. And in determining the sample, the researcher employed a statistical formular devised by Yaro Yamene (1973). Thus (412) four hundred and twelve represents the sample size which was the determinant for the number of questionnaires distributed. Stratified random sampling technique which appreciates a homogeneous class or group within a heterogeneous sample population was adopted for the study. This was to make the sample size representative and reliable.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected through personal observations, focused group discussions and secondary source were subjected to content analysis while primarily sourced data were subjected to simple statistical treatment. They were organized and presented in tables and percentages. Also, T-test statistical analyses based on Likert's 5 point scale was used to test the hypotheses.

### **Data Presentation**

#### **Citizen's involvement**

There were dissenting opinions on the interviews and focused group discussions conducted. Community leaders on their individual views were bitter at the deterioration of governance at the grassroots level. The leaders on their perspectives pointed out that between 1999 and 2006, when the local government were further decentralized, there were no development but more people were involved in governance. They bemoaned the current situation at the local governments in Enugu state especially the process of elections, in the past twelve years (2007 to 2019).

Moreover, women groups seriously decried high level marginalization in the political system especially at the local level. They emphasized the level of support such as mobilizing themselves whenever they are called upon for rallies and voting in elections. They alleged that they outnumber the men in participation (voting and rally) yet they are not given space in the political system for representative capacity. The women group opined that their relevance begins and ends at campaign rally and voting grounds. They enumerated a lot of barriers that impedes their active political participation such as; midnight political meetings, lack of finance, primary role in the home as mothers etc.

### **Voting behaviour**

Most of them emphasized lack of credible elections as the mother of various problems encountered in Isi Uzo local government today. To them, free and fair elections are the most effective guarantor of political participation and development at the grassroots.

Focused group discussions are not left out as youth participants summarily noted a drastic decline in citizens' participation in governance especially during elections in Isi Uzo Local Government and attributed it to few issues such as; over politicization and intimidation of community based groups to whittle down their powers so they will not challenge the government. They maintained that instead of interfacing with the government on issues of their concern, they are left in oblivion leading to apathy. This apathy, to them, is as a result of lack of confidence in the process and mechanisms of governance and leadership succession at the grassroots. They also identified the issue of fielding unqualified, unfamiliar and unpopular candidates in various positions at the local government as one of the banes of active political participation.

### **Return rate of questionnaire**

Out of the 412 copies of the questionnaire that were distributed, 360 copies were correctly filled and returned. This gave 87% success rate. However, 52 (13%) copies of the questionnaire were not correctly filled or returned. Based on the 87% success rate, the data from the correctly filled copies of the questionnaire were deemed adequate for use in this study.

### **Demographic factors**

On gender, female respondents are 127 representing 35.3% while males are 233 representing 64.7% respectively. The result shows that male respondents are more in number. On age distribution, 88 respondents representing 24.4% fall within the age bracket of 18-27 years, 107 respondents representing 29.7% are within the bracket of 28-37 years, 97 respondents representing 26.9% are within 38-47 years, 68 respondents representing 18.9% are within the bracket of 48 years and above. Hence, majority of the respondents fall within 28-37 years.

Based on occupation 24 respondents representing 6.7% are Artisans, 73 respondents representing 20.3% are in business, 9 respondents representing 2.5 percent are clergymen, 152 respondents representing 42.2% are farmers, 56 respondents representing 15.6% are public servants, 36 respondents representing 10% are students while 10 respondents representing 2.8% did not indicate their occupation. Therefore farmers were the highest respondents with 152 representing 42.2%.

Based on educational qualifications, 32 respondents representing 8.9% don't have qualification, 120 respondents representing 33.3% have FLSC, 143 respondents representing 39.7% have WASC and NECO, and 65 respondents representing 18.1% have higher educational qualifications. Hence, O/Level holders with 143 in number are the highest respondents based on educational qualification.

On community representation, 117 respondents representing 32.5% are from Eha Amufu, 66 respondents representing 18.3% are from Ikem, 68 respondents representing 18.9% are from Mbu, 73 respondents representing 20.3% are from Neke and 36 respondents representing 10.0% are from Umualor. Therefore, Eha Amufu community with 117 respondents is the highest.

### Presentation of Data Based on Research Questions

#### Decision Rule:

**Accept a mean item less than 3.0 and Reject a mean item Greater than 3.0**

NB; the decision 3.0 is a standard statistical decision rule for Likert's 5 point scale analysis derived thus: Strongly Agree =5, Agree =4, Undecided =3, strongly Disagree =2 and Disagree =1  
 $5+4+3+2+1 = 15 \div 5 = 3$

**Table 1: Research Question 1**

S/N	Political Awareness Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Local government educates and sensitizes citizens on political activities	360	3.1583	1.59733	Reject
2	Citizens are usually aware of policies and activities of local government	360	3.1194	1.68217	Reject
3	Elected local government officials regularly interact with citizens in formal for a	360	3.4389	1.68944	Reject
4	Citizens have unrestricted access to information about local government policies and decisions	360	3.7139	1.55452	Reject
5	Citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities/ duties to local government	360	3.5056	1.53691	Reject

**Table 2 : Research Question 2**

S/N	Voting Behaviour Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	I vote in elections in Isi Uzo LGA since 1999	360	1.9083	1.32889	Accepted
2	Local government provides voter education for all eligible citizens	360	3.1139	1.71373	Rejected



3	All eligible citizens are allowed to vote during local government elections	359	1.4178	1.04015	Accepted
4	Local government voters' register is reliable and regularly updated	360	3.5833	1.27925	Rejected
5	Citizens see voting as business for only politicians not as a civic responsibility	360	3.6778	1.14496	Rejected

Source: Field Study, 2019

### Test of Research Hypotheses

#### Decision:

Reject  $H_0$  if T- calculated is less than T- critical

Accept  $H_0$  if T-calculated is greater than T-critical

T-calculated is the value of T as calculated from the responses on a particular questionnaire item using T- test statistical analysis while T- critical is the standard value of T on a T- table.

**Table 3 : Research Question 3**

S/N	Citizens Involvement In Governance Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Local government consults citizens in government decision making on matters that affect them	360	3.8556	1.47258	Rejected
2	Citizens are involved in local government budgeting	360	4.0778	1.33500	Rejected
3	Local government encourages town union involvement in governance	360	4.0167	1.32881	Rejected
4	Communities are involved in project identification and monitoring	360	3.3944	1.40630	Rejected
5	Elected representatives (councilors) have close link and consultation with their wards	360	3.6639	1.44570	Rejected

**Table 4: Political awareness among citizens in Isi Uzo LGA between 1999 and 2019 is minimal**

Respondents	N	X	SD	Df	T-cal	T-crit	Decision
Political awareness	360	3.38	1.60	4	12.89	2.78	Accept



On this hypothesis, the value of T- calculated is 12.89 and that of T-critical is 2.78. This implies that the value of T-calculated is greater than that of T- critical. Therefore, the hypothesis that; Political awareness among citizens in Isi Uzo LGA between 1999 and 2019 is minimal was accepted.

**Table 5: Voting turnout of citizens in elections in Isi Uzo LGA between 1999 and 2019 is high**

Respondents	N	X	SD	Df	T-cal	T-crit	Decision
Voting behavior	360	2.72	1.29	4	1.60	2.78	Reject

On the second hypothesis, the value of T- calculated is 1.60 and that of T-critical is 2.78. This implies that the value of T-calculated is less than that of T- critical. Therefore, the hypothesis that; voting behavior of citizens in elections in Isi UzoLGA between 1999 and 2019 is high was rejected

**Table 6:That Isi Uzo LGA did not encourage grassroots involvement in decision making from 1999 to 2019**

Respondents	N	X	SD	Df	T-cal	T-crit	Decision
Grassroots Involvement	360	3.79	1.39	4	11.18	2.78	Accept

The value of T- calculated on the hypothesis that Isi Uzo LGA did not encourage grassroots involvement in decision making from 1999 to 2019 is 11.18 and that of T-critical is 2.78. This implies that the value of T-calculated is greater than that of T- critical. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

## Findings

After data analysis, a summary of information obtained shows that;

- Political awareness among citizens in Isi Uzo LGA between 1999 and 2019 is negligible
- Voting turnout of citizens in elections in Isi Uzo LGA between 1999 and 2019 is low
- Isi Uzo LGA did not encourage grassroots involvement in decision making from 1999 to 2019
- Feedback mechanism as postulated in political systems theory was not operational during the period under study.

## Summary of Findings

Local government administration in Enugu state has been not been able to engender grassroots participation. The most attribute of this failure is lack of effective community involvement in governance; dearth of qualified and competent office holders; apathy as a result of loss of confidence on politicians by the people; lack of credible elections at the grassroots; Lack of proper

political education and awareness; Absence of feedback apparatus, domineering influence of the state to mention but a few. These challenges have undermined the ability of the local government council to deliver on their mandate especially in the provision of social services to the rural communities.

## Conclusion

To conclude, Kjaer (2011) submitted that where a local authority is genuinely accountable to a local electorate, it will have more incentive to improve the services for which it is responsible. He believed that active participation is essential to improved performance and that accountability is stronger when authorities and those they govern are proximate. Going by this assertion, all hands must be on deck to encourage citizens' active involvement in governance at the grassroots especially in Isi Uzo local government, from participating in elections, policy formulation, project identification, budgeting to project implementation and monitoring. This will guarantee grassroots development.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- Credible elections at the grassroots right from party primaries to general elections should be guaranteed to give the people opportunity to choose their leaders. It will also engender active grassroots political participation.
- Political education and sensitization campaign should be effectively done not only by political parties but also by other government agencies to keep the rural people abreast of government programmes and activities around them
- Honest people of proven integrity should be given the privilege to serve at the local level so that such office should not be seen as an opportunity to amass wealth but a call to service. This will help regain peoples' trust on leadership and governance.
- Town hall meetings should be organized from time to time by the council to engender interactions and reactions of citizens on government policies and projects. This will create opportunity for them to participate in decision making.

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