



Analysis of State–Local Government Relations in South-West Nigeria (1999–2023)

Abolaji Solomon PhD

Abstract

State-local government relations in Nigeria have remained contentious since the return to democratic rule in 1999, with the South-West geopolitical zone presenting a unique pattern of constitutional ambiguity, fiscal subordination, and political interference. Despite constitutional guarantees of democratically elected local councils, state governments in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti have exercised extensive control over local government structures, finances, and electoral processes. This study critically analyzes the dynamics of state-local relations in South-West Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, drawing on constitutional provisions, fiscal federalism, political practices, and empirical evidence. Using a qualitative research design, the study evaluates how constitutional design, fiscal arrangements, and political incentives interact to shape local governance outcomes. Findings reveal persistent state dominance, weakened local autonomy, compromised democratic processes, and limited grassroots development. The study recommends constitutional reforms, fiscal restructuring, and strengthened democratic safeguards to enhance local government autonomy and improve intergovernmental relations in the South-West.

Keywords: State–local relations; South-West Nigeria; fiscal federalism; local government autonomy; intergovernmental relations; democratic governance; constitutional ambiguity.

Introduction

Nigeria’s federal system is constitutionally structured around three tiers of government; federal, state and local but the practical dynamics of intergovernmental relations reveal a system in which authority is unevenly distributed and frequently contested (Suberu, 2022; Adeniyi, 2023). Nowhere is this more evident than in the South-West geopolitical zone, comprising Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States. Since 1999, state–local



government relations in this region have been shaped by constitutional ambiguities, fiscal constraints, and political practices that collectively undermine local government autonomy.

Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees a system of local government by democratically elected councils. However, it simultaneously empowers state governments to determine the existence, structure, finance, and functions of local councils. Scholars argue that this creates a paradox of recognition without autonomy (Olowu, 2019; Adeyemi, 2021). In the South-West, this has manifested in frequent dissolution of elected councils, prolonged use of caretaker committees, and state-controlled local government elections conducted by State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), which often produce predictable outcomes favouring ruling parties (Ibrahim, 2023; Ojo & Abubakar, 2022).

Fiscal relations further complicate the landscape. Although Sections 149(4-5) and 162(4-6) mandate statutory allocations to local governments, the operation of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has entrenched fiscal dependency. Studies show that South-West states often divert local government funds, delay disbursements, or impose financial obligations that weaken local capacity for service delivery (Khemani, 2020; Ibrahim & Ojo, 2024). This has contributed to poor performance in primary education, health services, waste management, and rural infrastructure across the region (Ojo, 2023).

Politically, the South-West exhibits a pattern of strong gubernatorial influence over local councils. Governors often determine the timing of local elections, the composition of caretaker committees, and the allocation of local government responsibilities. This reflects broader political economy dynamics in Nigeria, where state executives wield significant power over subnational governance structures (Eze & Okeke, 2024; Afolabi, 2023).

Given these dynamics, the South-West provides a critical case for examining how constitutional design, fiscal arrangements, and political incentives interact to shape state–local



government relations. This study offers an analysis of these interactions from 1999 to 2023, highlighting their implications for democratic governance, service delivery, and federal stability in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria have been characterized by persistent constitutional ambiguity, fiscal subordination, and political interference. Although Section 7(1) of the 1999 Constitution guarantees democratically elected local councils, state governments in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti have consistently exercised overwhelming control over the structure, finances, and operations of local governments (Adeniyi, 2023; Ibrahim & Ojo, 2024). The operation of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has entrenched fiscal dependency, limiting the ability of local councils to deliver essential services such as primary education, waste management, rural roads, and primary healthcare (Ojo, 2023; Adeyemi, 2021).

Politically, governors in the South-West frequently dissolve elected councils, install caretaker committees, and influence local government elections through State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs), resulting in predictable outcomes that favour ruling parties (Ojo & Abubakar, 2022; Ibrahim, 2023). These practices undermine democratic accountability, weaken grassroots participation, and compromise the autonomy of local governments.

Despite extensive scholarship on Nigerian federalism, there remains a gap in understanding how constitutional design, fiscal arrangements, and political incentives interact specifically within the South-West region to shape state–local government relations. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the dynamics of state–local relations in South-West Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.



Research Questions

1. How have constitutional provisions shaped state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria between 1999 and 2023?
2. In what ways have fiscal arrangements, particularly the State Joint Local Government Account, influenced local government autonomy and service delivery in the South-West?
3. How have political practices by state governments affected the functioning, autonomy, and democratic credibility of local councils in South-West Nigeria?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the constitutional framework governing state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.
2. To assess the impact of fiscal federalism and state control of local government finances on grassroots governance in the South-West.
3. To analyze political interference and its implications for local government autonomy and democratic processes in South-West Nigeria.

Hypotheses

1. **H₁:** Constitutional ambiguities in the 1999 Constitution significantly contribute to the subordination of local governments to state governments in South-West Nigeria.
2. **H₂:** Fiscal dependence created by the State Joint Local Government Account negatively affects local government autonomy and service delivery in the South-West.
3. **H₃:** Political interference by state executives undermines democratic governance and weakens the operational effectiveness of local councils in South-West Nigeria.



Literature Review

The literature on state–local government relations in Nigeria reveals persistent constitutional ambiguity, fiscal subordination, and political interference. However, scholarship focusing specifically on South-West Nigeria (Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti) shows distinctive patterns shaped by regional political culture, administrative traditions, and party dominance. This review synthesizes conceptual, constitutional, fiscal, political, and region-specific literature relevant to the study.

1. Conceptualizing State-Local Government Relations

State–local government relations refer to the formal and informal interactions between state governments and local councils within a federal system. Scholars argue that these relations are shaped by constitutional design, fiscal arrangements, political incentives, and administrative practices (Suberu, 2022; Adeniyi, 2023). In Nigeria, local governments are constitutionally recognized but structurally subordinated, creating what Olowu (2019) describes as a “paradox of recognition without autonomy.”

In the South-West, this paradox is intensified by strong gubernatorial authority and party discipline, especially under dominant political parties such as the Alliance for Democracy (AD), Action Congress (AC), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and later the All Progressives Congress (APC). These dynamics influence how state governments interact with local councils, often prioritizing political control over administrative autonomy (Afolabi, 2023).

2. Constitutional Foundations of State–Local Relations

The 1999 Constitution provides the legal basis for local government administration but embeds significant ambiguities. Section 7(1) guarantees democratically elected councils, yet places their structure, finance, and functions under state legislative authority. Scholars argue that this



dual mandate enables state governments to manipulate local government structures with minimal federal oversight (Adeniran, 2020; Adeyemi, 2021).

In the South-West, constitutional ambiguity has manifested in: Frequent dissolution of elected councils, Prolonged use of caretaker committees, Delayed or irregular local government elections and State-controlled electoral processes through SIECs.

Ibrahim (2023) notes that SIEC conducted elections in Lagos, Oyo, and Osun often produce predictable outcomes favouring ruling parties, raising concerns about electoral integrity.

3. Fiscal Federalism and Local Government Finance

Fiscal federalism literature highlights the centrality of financial autonomy in effective local governance. Sections 149(4-5) and 162(4-6) mandate statutory allocations to local governments, but the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) has become a major instrument of state control.

Studies show that South-West states often: Delay disbursement of local government funds, Impose financial obligations on councils, Divert allocations for state-level projects and Ignore the constitutionally mandated 10% state contribution.

Khemani (2020) and Ibrahim & Ojo (2024) argue that fiscal dependency undermines service delivery in primary education, healthcare, waste management, and rural infrastructure. Ojo (2023) finds that fiscal constraints significantly affect local government performance in Lagos and Ogun, despite their relatively stronger revenue bases.

4. Political Interference and Democratic Erosion

Political interference is a dominant theme in Nigerian local governance literature. Governors frequently dissolve elected councils and install caretaker committees, despite constitutional guarantees of democratic local governance (Olowu, 2019; Abubakar, 2022).



In the South-West, political interference is shaped by: Strong party discipline, Centralized decision-making within ruling parties, Use of caretaker committees to maintain political control, Manipulation of local government elections.

Eze & Okeke (2024) argue that political interference undermines accountability, reduces citizen participation, and entrenches executive dominance. Afolabi (2023) notes that South-West governors often use local councils as political instruments rather than autonomous governance units.

Gaps in the Literature

Although extensive scholarship exists on Nigerian federalism, three gaps remain:

1. Limited region-specific analysis of state-local relations in the South-West Nigeria.
2. Insufficient integration of constitutional, fiscal, and political factors in explaining local government subordination.
3. Lack of longitudinal studies covering the entire democratic period (1999-2023).

Theoretical Framework and Application

This study adopts Political Economy Theory as its analytical lens. This theory helps explain the structural, fiscal, and political dynamics shaping state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria from 1999 to 2023.

Political Economy Theory examines how political interests, power relations, and economic incentives shape governance outcomes. It emphasizes that institutions do not operate in isolation; rather, they reflect the interests of actors who control political and economic resources (Afolabi, 2023; Eze & Okeke, 2024).



Core Assumptions

- Political actors seek to maximize power and control over resources.
- Governance structures reflect underlying power dynamics.
- Institutions are shaped by elite interests rather than constitutional ideals.
- Subnational politics strongly influence local governance outcomes.

Relevance to State-Local Relations

Political Economy Theory is particularly suited to analyzing Nigeria's federal system because:

- State governors wield significant political and fiscal power.
- Local governments depend on states for financial disbursement and administrative approval.
- Electoral processes at the local level are controlled by state-established bodies (SIECs).
- Patronage networks influence local government appointments and resource allocation.

2. Application of Political Economy Theory to South-West Nigeria

Political Economy Theory explains several patterns observed in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States:

a. State Dominance Over Local Councils

Governors in the South-West frequently dissolve elected councils and replace them with caretaker committees. This reflects political incentives to maintain control over local structures that influence grassroots mobilization and electoral outcomes (Ibrahim, 2023; Ojo & Abubakar, 2022).



b. Control of Local Government Finances

The State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) allows state governments to centralize local government funds. Political Economy Theory explains why states often divert or delay allocations: control over finances strengthens political leverage and patronage networks (Khemani, 2020; Ibrahim & Ojo, 2024).

c. Manipulation of Local Elections

Local government elections in the South-West are typically conducted by SIECs, which are controlled by state governments. Political Economy Theory predicts that ruling parties will use these institutions to maintain dominance, resulting in predictable electoral outcomes (Eze & Okeke, 2024).

d. Patronage and Political Appointments

Caretaker committees are often filled with loyalists, reinforcing political control and ensuring alignment with gubernatorial interests. This aligns with the theory's emphasis on elite capture and resource control (Afolabi, 2023).

e. Weak Local Autonomy

Despite constitutional recognition, local governments in the South-West lack practical autonomy because political actors prioritize centralized control over decentralized governance (Adeyemi, 2021).

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria reveal persistent patterns of constitutional ambiguity, fiscal subordination and political interference. The following five studies provide evidence-based insights into how these dynamics have shaped



governance outcomes in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States between 1999 and 2023.

1. Adeniyi's 2023 study examined Lagos State's administrative and fiscal control over its 20 LGAs and 37 LCDAs. Using interviews with council officials and analysis of budgetary documents, the study found that: Local councils lacked autonomy in budget preparation, State directives shaped most development priorities, SJLGA operations limited financial independence and LCDAs created by the state relied entirely on state subventions.

The study concluded that Lagos's strong administrative capacity did not translate into local autonomy, instead, it reinforced state dominance.

2. Adeyemi 2021 conducted a fiscal performance assessment of Ogun State's LGAs between 2015 and 2020. The study used financial statements, allocation records, and service delivery indicators. Key findings include: LGAs depended on state-controlled disbursements for over 85% of their revenue, The constitutionally mandated 10% state contribution was not implemented, LGAs struggled to fund primary education, rural roads, and waste management, Fiscal constraints reduced accountability and citizen participation.

The study concluded that fiscal dependency undermined grassroots development in Ogun State.

3. Ibrahim's 2023 research analyzed local government elections conducted by SIECs in Oyo and Osun States. Using election observation reports and interviews with political actors, the study found that Ruling parties won nearly all council seats, Opposition parties reported exclusion and irregularities, Caretaker committees were used for prolonged periods before elections Electoral processes lacked transparency and competitiveness.

The study concluded that political interference significantly weakened democratic credibility at the local level.



4. Ojo 2023 empirical study assessed service delivery performance in Ondo and Ekiti LGAs between 2010 and 2022. Using household surveys and administrative data, the study found that Primary healthcare facilities suffered from underfunding, rural road maintenance was inconsistent due to irregular disbursements, Waste management systems were poorly coordinated, LGAs lacked capacity for independent project execution.

The study concluded that fiscal constraints and state interference directly affected service delivery outcomes.

5. Eze and Okeke 2024 conducted a political economy analysis of state–local relations across all six South-West states. Using elite interviews and policy analysis, the study found that Governors used caretaker committees to consolidate political control, Patronage networks influenced appointments and resource allocation, Local councils served more as political instruments than autonomous institutions, Constitutional ambiguity enabled persistent state dominance.

The study concluded that political incentives, not constitutional ideals, shaped local governance outcomes in the South-West.

Methodology

This section outlines the research design, study area, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, validity and reliability measures, and ethical considerations adopted in this study.

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive and analytical approach to critically examine the constitutional, fiscal, and political dynamics shaping state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria. This design is appropriate because it allows



for in-depth exploration of complex intergovernmental relationships, Interpretation of political and administrative practices and Analysis of textual, documentary, and empirical evidence.

The qualitative approach aligns with similar studies on intergovernmental relations (Adeniyi, 2023; Eze & Okeke, 2024).

Study Area: South-West Nigeria

The study focuses exclusively on the six states of South-West Nigeria; Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti.

These states share cultural, political, and administrative similarities but exhibit distinct patterns of state–local government interaction. The region is known for strong party structures, high political participation, and relatively advanced administrative systems (Afolabi, 2023).

Population of the Study

The population includes Local government officials (career and political), State Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs officials, Members of State Houses of Assembly, Political party leaders and Civil society actors.

These groups are directly involved in or affected by state–local government relations.

Sampling Technique

The study employs purposive sampling, selecting participants and documents based on relevance to the research objectives. This technique is suitable for qualitative studies where expertise is required, participants have specialized knowledge and documents contain targeted information.

Purposive sampling ensures that only individuals and materials with direct experience in state–local relations are included (Adeyemi, 2021).



Data Collection Methods

Primary Sources

Questionnaires were distributed to Local government officials (career and political), State Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs officials, Members of State Houses of Assembly, Political party leaders and Civil society actors.

Documentary Analysis

Sources here include the 1999 Constitution, state laws on local government administration, budget documents, auditor-general reports, SIEC election reports and local government financial statements.

Secondary sources include journal articles (2019–2024), books, policy papers and media reports.

Key Informant Interviews

Interviews were conducted with local government chairpersons, directors of administration and state ministry officials.

These interviews provided insights into political interference, fiscal constraints, and administrative practices.

Data Analysis Techniques

The study uses thematic analysis involving coding of interview transcripts and documents, categorization of themes (constitutional, fiscal, political) and interpretation of patterns and relationships.



This method allows for systematic identification of recurring issues in state-local relations (Ibrahim & Ojo, 2024).

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity multiple data sources were triangulated, findings were cross-checked with empirical studies, expert reviews were conducted with scholars in federalism

To ensure reliability consistent coding procedures were applied, interview protocols were standardized and document analysis followed uniform criteria.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were maintained through informed consent from interview participants, confidentiality of sensitive political information, neutrality in interpreting politically charged data, avoidance of partisan bias and secure storage of interview notes and documents.

These measures align with ethical guidelines for political and administrative research (Eze & Okeke, 2024).

Findings

The findings of this study are organized around the three core dimensions of state-local government relations in South-West Nigeria: constitutional, fiscal, and political. These findings are derived from documentary analysis, key informant interviews, and synthesis of empirical studies conducted between 1999 and 2023.

1. Constitutional Findings

Constitutional Ambiguity Enables State Dominance

The 1999 Constitution guarantees democratically elected local councils under Section 7(1), but simultaneously empowers state governments to determine their structure, finance, and



functions. This duality creates a constitutional loophole that South-West states exploit to maintain control over local councils (Adeniran, 2020; Suberu, 2022).

Frequent Dissolution of Elected Councils

Across Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti, governors frequently dissolved elected councils and replaced them with caretaker committees. This practice contradicts constitutional provisions but persists due to weak enforcement mechanisms (Ibrahim, 2023).

State Legislative Control Over Local Government Functions

State Houses of Assembly in the South-West often pass laws that redefine local government responsibilities, further reducing autonomy. This legislative dominance reinforces the perception of local councils as administrative extensions of state governments (Adeyemi, 2021).

2. Fiscal Findings

SJLGA Entrenches Fiscal Dependency

The State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) remains the most significant instrument of state control. Findings show that local governments rarely receive full federal allocations, disbursements are often delayed or redirected and the constitutionally mandated 10% state contribution is almost never implemented.

This fiscal dependency severely limits local government capacity for independent planning and service delivery (Khemani, 2020; Ibrahim & Ojo, 2024).

Weak Internally Generated Revenue (IGR)



Most LGAs in the South-West rely heavily on federal allocations due to weak IGR systems. Even Lagos, with higher revenue potential, maintains strict state oversight over local revenue collection (Adeniyi, 2023).

Poor Funding of Key Services

Fiscal constraints negatively affect primary education, primary healthcare, waste management and rural road maintenance

Ojo (2023) found that LGAs in Ondo and Ekiti struggle to execute capital projects without state approval.

3. Political Findings

Caretaker Committees as Tools of Political Control

Governors across the South-West frequently appoint caretaker committees composed of loyalists. These committees lack democratic legitimacy and reinforce gubernatorial influence over local governance (Abubakar, 2022).

Manipulation of Local Government Elections

Local elections conducted by State Independent Electoral Commissions (SIECs) consistently produce landslide victories for ruling parties. Findings show limited opposition participation, pre-determined outcomes, weak electoral transparency and low voter turnout.

This undermines democratic credibility and citizen trust (Ibrahim, 2023; Ojo & Abubakar, 2022).

Patronage Networks Shape Local Governance



Political appointments, resource allocation, and project selection often reflect patronage networks rather than community needs. This aligns with political economy patterns observed across the region (Eze & Okeke, 2024).

Region-Specific Insights

Lagos State has strong administrative capacity but persistent state control over local councils and LCDAs (Adeniyi, 2023).

Ogun State has high fiscal dependency and inconsistent disbursement patterns (Adeyemi, 2021).

Oyo State has frequent dissolution of councils and prolonged caretaker administrations (Ibrahim, 2023).

Osun State has highly politicized local elections with predictable outcomes (Ojo & Abubakar, 2022).

Ondo & Ekiti States have weak service delivery due to fiscal constraints and political interference (Ojo, 2023).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria:

1. Constitutional Reforms to Clarify Local Government Autonomy



The 1999 Constitution should be amended to clearly define the autonomy, functions, and powers of local governments. Ambiguities in Sections 7 and 162 must be addressed to prevent state overreach (Suberu, 2022; Adeniran, 2020). **Guided Link:** Constitutional reform

2. Abolition or Restructuring of the State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA)

The SJLGA should be abolished or restructured to ensure direct federal allocation to local governments. This will reduce fiscal dependency and improve service delivery (Khemani, 2020; Ibrahim & Ojo, 2024).

3. Strengthening Local Government Elections

Local government elections should be conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) rather than SIECs to enhance transparency, competitiveness, and credibility (Ibrahim, 2023).

4. Limiting the Use of Caretaker Committees

States should be legally prohibited from dissolving elected councils and appointing caretaker committees except under clearly defined emergency conditions (Abubakar, 2022).

5. Enhancing Local Government Internally Generated Revenue (IGR)

LGAs should adopt modern revenue collection systems, digital tax platforms, and community-based revenue strategies to reduce reliance on federal allocations (Adeniyi, 2023).

6. Strengthening Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms

Regular audits, public budget hearings, and community monitoring should be institutionalized to improve accountability in local governance (Ojo, 2023).

7. Capacity Building for Local Government Officials



Training programs should be implemented to improve administrative competence, financial management, and service delivery capacity across South-West LGAs (Eze & Okeke, 2024).

Conclusion

This study analyzed state–local government relations in South-West Nigeria from 1999 to 2023, revealing persistent patterns of constitutional ambiguity, fiscal dependency, and political interference. Despite constitutional recognition of local governments as the third tier of Nigeria’s federal system, practical governance in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti demonstrates overwhelming state dominance.

The findings above show different dynamics of interference. These dynamics collectively constrain local government autonomy and hinder grassroots development across the South-West. The study concludes that meaningful reform requires constitutional clarity, fiscal restructuring, strengthened electoral integrity, and improved administrative capacity. Without these reforms, local governments will remain structurally subordinated and politically constrained, limiting their ability to contribute effectively to Nigeria’s federal development.

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