

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The paper examined a comparative analysis of local government system in United State of America and Nigeria with hope to provide an effective and functional local government system in both United States of America and Nigeria. United States of America operates multi-purpose while Nigeria operates single-purpose local government systems. The two systems are geared towards providing better service delivery to their people. The study adopted the used of secondary data to obtain relevant information that guided major decisions in the study. Major decision in the study revealed that there is a remarkable difference between local government system in United States of America and Nigeria. Local governments systems in United States of America are far ahead of their counterpart in Nigeria in the area of funding, fund management, autonomy and purposeful leadership. The two countries though not enjoying complete financial autonomy because their greater sources of revenue are derived from the state and governments at the centre. More so, it is pertinent to note that Nigeria has so much to learn and benefit from the system of governance in local governments in United States of America. Based on the above, it worthy to recommended that the sustainability of local government systems in both United States of America and Nigeria, should be given a chance to run itself, source for fund, encourage free and democratically elected local government officials without interference in other to engender effective service delivery in the local government systems.*

**Keywords:** *Comparative, effective service delivery, Local government, primary function systems*

### Introduction

The primary essence of government is to protect lives, freedom and properties as well as to provide necessary conveniences for its citizenry (Clark, 2015). Governance at the local level is saddled with some critical role in ensuring the usefulness and provision of public goods to enormous rural population. Agba et al., in Nweneka (2018) opined that the creation of local government anywhere in the world started from the need to provide reasonable services and fast-forward development at the grassroots. Thus, guided by the above information, the political systems of Nigeria and America, though different in several aspects, ensured the continuous existence of local government councils and administration. Nigeria is a federal republic of 36 states with three levels or tiers of government which are; federal, state and local governments. Nigeria has 774 local government areas. They are located in various states of the federation with varying numbers. Nigeria practice single tier local government system, which significantly differ from that of United States of America with multi-tier system of Local Government. There are five types of local government system. These are the Counties, Municipalities, Towns and townships, Special districts and School districts. The number of local government varies from state to

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state. For example, Pennsylvania had 4,871 local jurisdictions. The state contains 66 counties, 1016 cities, 546 townships, 1728 special districts and 515 school districts. The underlying reason for a comparative analysis is to incorporate the major political similarities and differences between countries. Our main duty here is to shed light in other to bring to the understanding of the nature of constraints and unpredictability which symbolizes the world's governments, bearing in mind the national and international contexts within which they operate (king et al, in Nweneka (2018). Munro in Nweneka (2018) observed that comparison broadens our understanding, casting fresh light on our home nation, improves our classifications of political processes, enables us to test hypotheses and gives us some potential for prediction and control.

Local government is government at the local level. It is often denoted to as the government at the grassroots level. Though, earlier mentioned above, Ntiwunka (2011) reiterated that the creation of local government in many countries started from the need to facilitate development at the grassroots and to decongest the functions and burden of central government, to bring about democratic climate of opinion; to provide valuable political education, to provide two-way communication, to ensure even and rapid development (provide basic socio-economic services), to serve as a hedge against over- concentration of power; to maintain law, and order etc. Thus, it is usually created by a law of the central government in a unitary system, and the law of the state in a federal system of government. Through the Local Government, the work of the government is sparsely distributed on a territorial basis thereby making it possible for the people of the local communities to be part of the management of their local affairs (Abba, 2008). The above discuss places local government system as the economic hub of the local communities as well as providing support to state and the federal levels to entrench economic development. But even with the numerous 774 local government councils in Nigeria, it appears that they contribute but little to national development. Overtime, many of our local councils seem not to bother about the statutory responsibilities as contained in the fourth schedule of the (1999 constitution). Although, this is contrary to what happens in the developed countries like United States of America where they build and maintain roads, creates jobs and bring government closer to the people. The Nigerian local government system has changed from being an organ of bringing government and dividends of democracy closer to the people to an organ for compensating political acolytes of the ruling parties in the states. This has created serious problem and has continually hindered development at the grassroots level. Thus, there is the need to curtail this situation so that local government can fulfill the purpose for which it was established. This paper tends to comparatively analyze local government system in United States of America and Nigeria.

### **Conceptual clarification of terms**

Local government is an essential instrument of National and State government for the achievement of certain basic services which could best be administered locally on the intimate knowledge of the needs, conditions and peculiarities of the areas concerned. It is the coming together of a people in a defined area; in a common organization whose functions are mutually complimentary to those of the central government and in the interest of the local residents for the satisfaction of common community needs. It is also the means by which the common problems and needs of that geographical location are economically and effectively catered for. Similarly, it is the means by which a local community satisfies jointly its common problem and needs which would have been difficult by individual.

However, the discussion is supported by various individuals and co-operate organizations in trying to conceptualize local government. Generally, it is comprehended as a form of public administration which, in a popular context, exists as the lowest tier or level of administration in a governmental system. Olisa in Osakede et al., (2014) sees it as a division of government below central regional or state levels established by law to apply political authority through a representative council within defined geographical area. Local governments operate at the grass root levels, within a defined geographical area and are a unit of government in both federalism and

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Unitarianism as practiced in Nigeria and Ghana respectively (Ogogo, 2004). The Federal Government of Nigeria Guideline on the Local Government Reform (1976) which declared that local government is the Government at the local level exercised through representative councils established by law to exercise specific powers, within defined areas. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs (including staffing) and institutional and to determine and implement projects so as to complement the activities of the state and federal governments in their areas, and ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

### **Local Government in United States of America**

In the beginning part of the United States, communities were venerated as civic republics. In a civic republic, community government is based on the standard of mutual consent. Inhabitants share fundamental beliefs and become parts and parcels in public affairs (Kincaid, 1987). There are two economically inspired conception of community and that of the corporate enterprise. The two theoretical orientations view the community as a civic republic and the community as a corporate enterprise which are considered viable. A new orientation has also emerged, which portrays the community as a consumer market (Kincaid, 1987). Thus, in a consumer market, citizens are consumers of public services and governments are providers. United States of America operates general and single-purpose local governments. General-purpose local governments are those that perform a wide range of governmental functions. These include three types of local governments: counties, municipalities, and towns and townships. Single-purpose local governments, as the name implies, have a specific purpose and perform one function. School districts and special districts are single-purpose governments. Thus, local government in United States of America is categorized into five types: These include Counties, Municipalities, Towns and Townships, School districts and Special districts. In a County Government, state governments carved up their territory into 3,033 discrete, general-purpose subunits called Counties (except in Louisiana, where counties are called parishes, and Alaska, where they are called boroughs). Counties exist everywhere, with only a few exceptions: Connecticut and Rhode Island, where there are no functional county governments. Counties were created by states for the purpose of administrative attachments. Their basic functions included property tax assessment and collection, law enforcement, elections, record keeping and road maintenance (Osakedeet al., 2014).

Furthermore, counties handle health care and hospitals, pollution control, mass transit, industrial development, social services, and consumer protection. (Hoene et al., 2002). The framework in which county government is based on a duly elected governing body, usually called a board of commissioners or supervisors, which is the central policy-making machinery in the county. The board makes county ordinances, approves the county budget, and appoints other officials (such as the directors of the county public works department and the county parks department). One of the board members acts as presiding officer. However, the board is not panacea of knowledge because several other county officials like the county prosecutor, the county clerk, the county treasurer, the county tax assessor and the sheriff are also duly elected to form a plural executive framework. Municipalities are cities; City is a legal acknowledgment of settlement patterns in an area. Inhabitants of an area in a county appeal the state for integration. The area slated for integration must meet certain criteria, such as population or density minimums. In Alabama, for instance, 300 people are the population threshold necessary for integration; in Arizona, the number is 1,500. In most cases, a referendum is required. The referendum enables citizens to vote on whether they wish to become an incorporated municipality. If the incorporation measure is successful, then a charter is granted by the state, and the newly created city has the legal authority to elect officials, levy taxes, and provide services to its residents. Like counties, cities are general-purpose units of local government. But unlike counties, they typically have greater decision-making authority and discretion. In

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addition, cities offer a wider array of services to their citizenry than most counties do. Police and fire services, public works, parks, and recreation are standard features, supplemented in some cities by publicly maintained cemeteries, city-owned and operated housing, and city- run docks, city-sponsored festivals, and city-constructed convention centers. Municipal government picks up garbage and trash, sweeps streets, inspects restaurants, maintains traffic signals, and plant trees. City governments operate with one of three structures: a mayor-council form, a council- manager form, or a city commission form. In each structure, an elected governing body, typically called a city council, has policy-making authority, what differentiates the three structures is the manner in which the executive branch is organized. Mayor-Council Form has the executive functions such as the appointment of department heads. This form of government can be sub-divided into two types, depending on the formal powers and authority held by the mayor. In a strong-mayor-council structure, the mayor is the source of executive leadership. They are responsible for daily administrative activities, the hiring and firing of top-level city officials, and budget preparation. The weak-mayor-council structure restricts the mayor's role to that of executive figurehead. The council (of which the mayor may be a member) is the source of executive power and legislative power. The council appoints city officials and develops the budget, and the mayor has no veto power but subservient to authority.

Council-Manager Form emphasizes the outright separation of politics (the policy-making activities of the governing body) from administration (the execution of the policies enacted by the governing body) .Under this structure, the council hires a professional administrator to manage city government. The administrator (usually called a city manager) appoints and removes department heads, oversees service delivery, develops personnel policies, and prepares budget proposals for the council (Svara, 1990). In City Commission Form, legislative and executive functions are merged. Commissioners are both policy makers and policy executors. One of the commissioners is designated as mayor simply to preside over commission meetings. The commission form of government was created as a reaction to the mayor-council structure. Its origin can be traced back to the inability of a mayor-council government in Galveston, Texas, to respond to the turmoil caused by a hurricane in 1900 that demolished the city and killed 6,000 people, Towns and Townships: These are general-purpose units of local government, distinct from county and city governments. Many New England towns continue their custom of direct democracy through a town meeting form of government. At a yearly town assembly, those living in the area make decisions on policy matters facing the community they elect town officials, pass local regulations, levy taxes, and adopt a budget. In other words, the people who attend the town meeting function as a legislative body. Although the apparatus of his town meeting shows democracy in action, it often falls short of the ideal, primarily due to the relatively low rate of citizen's contribution in meetings (Desantis et al., 2004). School Districts are special in nature. The trend in school districts follows the theory that fewer are better. Before World War 11, more than 100,000 school districts covered the countryside. Many of these were rural, one- school operations. In many small towns, community identity was linked to the local schoolhouse. Consolidating schools can be a political hot potato, as the former governor of Arkansas, Mike Huckabee learned. In 2003, Governor Huckabee proposed a consolidation plan that would eliminate school districts with fewer than 1,500 students (Ehrenhalt in Nweneke, 2018). In effect, it was an efficiency issue. The governor's plan meant eliminating two-thirds of the school districts in the state and merging them to create larger districts.

Special Districts are supposed to do what other local governments cannot or will not do. They are established to meet service needs in a particular area. Special districts can be created in three different ways: states can create them through special enabling legislation, general-purpose local governments may adopt a resolution establishing a special district and citizens may initiate districts by petition, which is often followed by a referendum on the question. Some districts have the power to levy taxes; others rely on user fees, grants, and private revenue bonds for funding. Taxing districts typically have elected governing boards; nontaxing districts called public authorities-, ordinarily operate with appointed boards .

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### **Sources of local government revenue in United States of America**

Cities, counties, and other local governments enjoy their own sources of revenue such as property taxes, user fees, and business license fees but they depend on the states for the majority of their income. They suffer the frustration of having to cope with increase expenditure demands from their people while, their authority to generate new monies is highly limited by state law, Not surprising, they turn to their boss (state) to surety them out when times are hard. Thus, the bulk and largest source of local revenues is the state. About 40 percent of all state expenditures go to local governments. Like federal grants-in-aid, however, state grants come with lots of strings attached. Most state dollars are set aside for public education and social welfare. Other state assistance is set aside for roads, hospitals, public safety and public health. The result is that local governments have little spending discretion. Naturally, great diversity characterized the levels of state assistance to local jurisdictions, much of which is related to the distribution of functions between a state and its localities. Highly centralized states such as Hawaii, South Carolina, and West Virginia fund and administer at the state level many programs that are funded and administered locally in decentralized states such as Maryland, New York, and Wisconsin.

### **Local Government administration in Nigeria**

Local administration at the grassroots level in Nigeria had been in existence since the beginning of time and before the advent of the colonial masters in Nigeria (Awofeso, 2004). It is not arguable that the history of local government system in Nigeria is older than the coming of the colonial masters. Fatile (2011) noted that Colonialism, however, helped to broaden the course of history of Nigerian administration systems as it significantly contributed to the evolution of modern local government in the country. Thus, there had been indigenous local administration in Nigeria before the introduction of the British system of local administration. Prior to Colonization, there were in existence in most Africa societies, local administrative mechanisms founded upon traditional institutions (Agbakoba et al. , 2004). In Nigeria today, the existing tribes that make up the geographical areas had had one form of local administration or the other. In the Northern part of the country, the Hausa/Fulani practiced a highly centralized form of government with the Emir at the head as both the political and religious leader. The Emir, however, delegated his power to District heads (the Magajis) to oversee the districts that made up the emirates. Hausa emirates had developed a well-organized fiscal system, a definite code of land tenure, a regular scheme of local rule through appointed district and village heads, as well as trained judiciary which administered the Islamic laws (Cia et al., 2003). In the South West zone of Nigeria where Yoruba is the principal ethnic group, the unit of administration in the various communities centered on the chiefs. Organizationally, the hierarchical structure of the Yoruba pre-colonial political system was such that, the Oba and his Senior Chiefs were collectively responsible for major decisions and administration in the centre, the headquarters or the empire's capital (Oyeweso, 2004). The Igbos are the major ethnic group in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Awofeso (2004) has noted, that the Igbo pre-colonial political system has been described as a cephalous, republican, fragmented and segmented. There was no sort of central authority, what they had was a diffusion of political authority into different groups (Anyaele, 2003). The local government administrative system in the colonial era began with the introduction of indirect rule by Lord Lugard. The reason for the introduction of indirect rule was for the reservation of the authority of the local rulers, local institutions, traditions and habits rather than attempt to enforce totally new and unfamiliar ideas from outside (Ola et al., 2003). The Local Government regulation of 1950 democratized Indigenous Administration in a way that about eight percent (8%) of the Councillors were duly elected in the Eastern Region. The regulation commenced in the West in 1952. The framework of Local Government was different in both regions. The Eastern and Western regions had a three tier or levels of local government system-the county district and local council in the East fashioned after the British

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system of Local Government (the County Council was abolished in 1958), and Divisional, District and Local in the West. Both the regions discarded the concept of indigenous authority. In the North, the Indigenous Authority Law of 1954 merely entrenched the native authority and the native and emirate councils were in place (Abba, 2008; Lasisi, 1997).

The local government administration system during the military dictatorship was highly swayed by the military orientation and socialization which fashioned hierarchical order and centralization of authority (Awofeso, 2004). The military eliminated all Local Councils and appointed Sole Administrators. Local government administration in Nigeria went through a lot of reforms between 1966 and 1976, at both regional and state levels but the 1976 reform happen to be the major one. Abba (2008) affirmed that the reform brought about single-tier local government system all through the country and established 301 local governments centered on a given population range of 150,000 and 800,000 with equivalent status and powers.

### **The local government structure in Nigeria**

The local government structure in Nigeria is in two kinds: (a) Political structure (b) Administrative council structure. The political structure entails of all elected officials such as Local Government Councillor and Chairman, the Committee and Supervisory Councillors. It is eminently made of the Legislature, the Executive, Committee, and the Secretary to the local government. In the presidential system of government, the position of Secretary to the Local Government automatically became a political appointment. The Secretary was usually appointed by the Chairman of the council and never enjoyed the power of the former secretary as in the case of a parliamentary system (Ntiwunka, 2011). The legislative arm of the local government is however called the legislative council with a leader selected by the majority of the councillors who servers as presiding officer. The leader is assisted by a Deputy leader. The clerk of the house is also appointed for the legislative council by the local government service commission. Adejobi (2011) noted that the councillors politically appoint majority and minority leaders along with the chief whip. Then other councillors who represent wards in the local government constitute the legislative council. The make byelaws, supervise the revenue collection and expenditure of the local government (Lasisi, 1997). The local government Executive arm is made up of the Chairman, Vice- Chairman, and the Supervisory Councillors.

The primary functions of the Council is the day-to-day running of the local government, decides on the implementation of policies and recommends byelaws and capital projects to the legislative council for approval. The Chairman is elected through an electioneering process in all the wards in the Local Government. In Nigeria, the Administrative head of Council is the Secretary of the Local Government who is subservient to the Chairman of the council. Those under the Secretary are departments headed by Heads of Departments. The law determines the number of departments in a Local Government. The departments are classified into; service and operational departments. The service departments deal with the personnel management and finance that support service delivery. The operational departments delivers the services on the field with the help of a structure called field or extension workers (technical, professional, and administrative in nature) who is answerable to the head of department (Course Guide, National Open University). Adejobi (2011) observed that the points of interaction between the executive and legislative organs in the local government may include: when the chairman has approvals to be made by the legislature such as the appointment of secretary, supervisors etc., during the presentation of annual budget, approval of major contracts, approval for the appointment of junior staff. Thus, the local government services commission offers the final approval for such appointment to ensure that laid down rules and regulations of the local government service are followed. The chairman can also meet with the councillors whenever the need arises.

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### **Sources of Revenue of Local Government in Nigeria**

Local government in Nigeria derives their revenues or finance through several ways (Nchuchuwe, 2011). Generally speaking, the sources can be classified into two: Internal and External. The internal sources (Internally Generated Revenue) are those ways from which the local governments generate their resources within their boundary. The sources include taxes, rates, licences, fees and fines, social charges, rent on local government' properties, interests and dividend on investments, miscellaneous etc. (Osakede et al., 2014). All these sources are principally the exclusive preserves of the local governments in Nigeria. At least, most Local governments in Nigeria generate less than 10% of their total revenue from internally generated revenue. The external sources of local government revenues include allocation from federation account, allocation from the state governments, stabilization and general ecology fund, income from value added tax, income from privatizations/Global System Mobile proceeds, grants from federal and state governments, donations, loans, foreign grants, aids and assistance, derivation funds etc.

### **Differences between local government system in United States of America and Nigeria**

United States of America practices multi-tier system of Local Government. They operate five types of local government system. They include Counties, Municipalities, Towns and townships, Special districts and School districts. The number of local governments differs from state to state. For instance, Osakede et al., (2014) noted that Pennsylvania had 4,871 local jurisdictions. The state contains 66 counties, 1016 cities, 546 townships, 1728 special districts and 515 school districts. Nigeria, operates a single-tier system of Local Government. This is based on a given population range of 150,000 and 800,000 with equal status and powers and authority. As a third level of government, it receives statutory allocations from federal government. Nigeria, for now has a total of 774 local governments. Local government has no position in the American constitution. State legislatures created local governments, and state constitutions and laws permit local governments to take on some of the responsibilities of the state governments (Wilbern in Nweneka, 2018).

In United States, local governments usually desire legal capacity to raise additional revenues themselves, especially through local alternative sales and income taxes. A share of gasoline, tobacco and other, tax benefits is greatly appreciated. In Nigeria, section 2 of the fifth schedule of the constitution strengthened the financial resources of local governments through federal allocation to all local governments. The idea of Electoral College is special to America. A candidate may lose in the popular vote and yet win through the Electoral College (America, *ibid*). The State Independent Electoral College in Nigeria conducts all elections into local government councils at different periods. The method of direct election is adopted by the electorates to elect their leaders.

### **Similarities between Local Government System in United States of America and Nigeria**

Below are the peculiar features that are common to United States of America and Nigeria. The two countries are set up by laws of the state. Section 7 of Nigerian 1999 constitution states "The system of Local government by democratically elected local government councils is under this constitution guaranteed; and: accordingly, the Government of every state shall, subject to section 8 of this constitution, ensure their existence under a Law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of such councils". In United States of America, irrespective of the purpose of local government, we must recollect that it has a lifeline to state government. In short, state government gives local government its legal existence.

In United State America, local authorities heavily depend on intergovernmental relations transfers. Generally, local government responsibilities have increased but their own revenue sources have kept pace. Therefore, intergovernmental transfers have filled the gap. Also, revenue patterns by the local governments differ in both countries. In United States of America, revenue is designed by the local government type, diversity of purpose, delegated authority and outside financing. Counties and municipalities are general purpose units (as opposed to special districts that are limited to specific purposes and revenue sources related to them (Fahim in

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Nweneka, 2018). Nigeria, on the other hand, revenue patterns differ based on the geographical zone of the local government councils. For instance, in Northern Nigeria, cattle tax is imposed on the cattle rearers but in Southern Nigeria taxes are paid on agricultural produce. Both states lack financial autonomy.

In Nigeria, most of the local governments find it difficult to locate feasible sources of generating revenue; they however rely heavily on the allocations from the federation account for purpose of carrying out their basic responsibilities. Ekweremadu in Osakede et al., 2014) asserted that over dependence on the federal allocation is the problem of most local governments in Nigeria today. More so, section 162, sub-section 6, of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria provides for a state-local government joint Account. This has been wholly abused by some state governments as a result of unlimited and inordinate influences exerted by states on local government funds (Nchuchuwe in Osakede et al., 2014). In United States of America, localities always go to the states to have more control over how money is spent and the independent power to raise it. The countries have experienced local government reforms. American, in the early years, cities like the English boroughs functioned under a form of “council government”. Precisely, local governmental powers were vested in the council. The reform in the 20th century introduced the Mayor Council, the Commission and the Council, and Manager Plans. Nigeria as a country have also experienced major Local Government reform in 1976 which of course made local government a third tier system of administration and presented a representatively elected Local Government council.

Another major feature of local government in both countries is the element of autonomy. Summarily, local authorities, whatever they may be, are permitted certain powers independent of external control. The functions of local government in Nigeria are encapsulated in the fourth schedule of 1999 constitution. As noted by Professor William Anderson, “a unit of local government in the United States can be defined as one which has a defined area and resident population, a separate and continuing governmental organisation of its own, the legal power to raise revenues and some elements of autonomy and usually of popular participation in the handling of local affairs (Odoh in Osakede et al., 2014).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has been able to comparative x-ray local government system in United States of America and Nigeria. The obvious is that Local Government systems in United States of America are far ahead and better than that of Nigeria in some critical areas such as funding, fund management, provision of better service delivery. In both countries, they yet to achieve full financial autonomy instead they rely on the state and federal government for economic survival. Guided by the above information, it will seemingly appear difficult for local governments to achieve sustainable development. This is because, local government tasks have increased tremendously over time, therefore, new revenue sources need to be harnessed so as to reduce overdependence on the State and Federal government allocation. Hence, to achieve sustainable and functional local government system in both United State of America and Nigeria, revenue driving policies and effective service delivery is needed.

### **Recommendations**

In order to promote ensure effective local governance administration in the United States of America and Nigeria, there is the need for local government to look inward and tap internal sources of revenue generation rather than depending on the allocations from the Federal and State governments that are neither adequate nor delayed unnecessarily. Local government should be empowered to generate revenue from other internal sources like taxes. Effective service delivery of local government is a function of financial autonomy of local government. The more revenue local government can generate on its own, the more confident it can become particularly in relations with other tiers of government . Encroachment in the affairs of local government is a threat to local government

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administration. Therefore, the constitutional provision that made local government must be respected by all and sundry.

Local governments are to provide full budget transparency so that interested citizens have online access to spending and taxing data. The online data will encourage public understanding of financial complexities and solicit interaction through budget calculators and simulations. The sacking of elected council executives by the states' chief executives in Nigeria without observing the rules for reasons that more often than not border on sheer politics should be revisited constitutionally.

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