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# THE DARK ARTS OF GOVERNANCE: MACHIAVELLIAN TACTICS AMONG NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELITES

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**Abstract:** The paper examined the relationship between elites' pervasive Machiavellian tactics and the performance of local governments in the Nigerian Fourth Republic. Through 1976 reform, local government became third tier of government which receives, apart from its internal revenues, monthly financial allocations from the Federation Account. The essence is to make it effective and efficient in carrying out its constitutional roles of promoting dividends of both democracy and good governance at the grassroots. Also, to reach wide spectrum of the Nigerian grassroots, it has undergone incremental reorganisations from 301 in 1984 to 774. Despite the reforms and incremental reorganisations, local governments are found to underperform their constitutional responsibilities to the grassroots' people. The paper employed analytico-causal approach which was done through library research. It was found out that the failure of Nigerian local governments in providing grassroots people with dividends of democracy and good governance was sequel to elites' pervasive Machiavellian tactics input into 1999 Nigerian Constitution. This is not without negative implications for Nigeria's security and socio-economic development. To make local governments deliver dividends of democracy and good governance to Nigerian grassroots, the removal of elite's Machiavellian tactics input into the 1999 Nigerian Constitution which alienates grassroots people from the controls of local governments is necessary. It is also important to prioritize democracy as a national ideal in order assuage the negative implications of non-performance of local governments in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Elites, Dividends of democracy and good governance, Local Government, Pervasive Machiavellian Tactics, Nigerian Fourth Republic.

## Introduction

In 1999, Nigeria transited from military autocracy to civil rule. But while Nigeria changed system of government, it did not change the characters of state institutions, and therefore the state institutions that are supposed to protect and drive democracy continue to maintain the elements of military rule (Iwar, 2022). Thus, perversion became the logic of the organic law or constitution or meta-institution. Meanwhile, institutions should serve as sanctions or constraints on and incentives of the key actors including the political-legal governance arrangements, property

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rights and rule of law, fiscal structure and distributional arrangements, transparent and accountable governance as well as speedy and fair dispensation of justice (Soludo, 2018). The purpose of institution is to direct the behaviour of the politicians and political elites and, thus directly influence political outcomes (Aiyede, 2021). Included in the perverted political-legal-governance arrangements in Nigeria is the local government system.

Especially for the grassroots' populace, the list of functions of local governments in the Fourth Schedule of 1999 Nigerian Constitution clearly demonstrates that local councils' responsibilities are those that are indispensable for the good of the people (Bolaji, 2008). Acknowledging this, Nigerian government thus made provision for monthly allocation (20.6% presently), as fallout of 1976 local government reform for local governments, from Federation Accounts and even increased their number to 774. But in spite of this huge monthly financial allocation from Federation Accounts and large number of local governments in Nigeria today, democracy and socio-economic lives remain sub-standard among the majority of rural inhabitants (Okunola, 2013; NISER 2014). This obtains because the pervasive Machiavellian tactics of ruling elites which make them deviate from altruistic motivations of political action, have stood in the way of the construction of common good (Osaghae, 2019).

In today's Nigeria, many states don't organize local government elections, they make use of caretaker committees and that local government funds are also in the pockets of state governors through state local government joint account (Section 162, sub section 6) of the 1999 constitution (Dapo-Asaju, 2018). The above is apart from the generally known internal problems of poor quality of personnel, political poverty of the local populace, corruption, and mismanagement of finance, among others, in the Nigerian local government system (Zoaka & Dauda, 1998; Gboyega, 2003; Ikelegbe, 2004; Onah, 2006; Bolaji, 2008; NISER, 2014). There has not been much solution to internal problems because the glaring fact about local governments in Nigeria is a case of the presence of the past in spite of its reforms and constitutional recognition. During the First Republic, regional governments took local authorities as instruments of political mobilization and so were condoned whatever aberrations perpetrated as long as they supported the government and appeared capable of delivering votes at elections for ruling party (Gboyega, 2003). This has not changed till today. In the Fourth Republic, the administrative and financial controls of local governments lie with the state government and not grassroots people in order to manipulate the resources of local governments for their selfish ends. This is however constitutionally recognized, but troublesome for successful local councils in Nigeria and that it has negative implications for national development in terms of security and socio-economic development.

This paper seeks to examine the relationship between Nigeria's 1999 meta-institution and Nigerian local governments' ability to deliver on their mandates of promoting dividends of democracy and dividends of good governance at the grassroots. This is to explain whether Nigeria's political institution is inclusive enough that the small and fortunate politicians at the higher level of governance (State Governors) do not just appropriate the resources of local governments, and thereby sentencing them to underdevelopment. Then, given the pervasive Machiavellian tactics that the elites incorporated into the 1999 Constitution which have rendered local government vulnerable to the whims and caprices of the elites of higher levels of government, especially the State Governors, can local government's failure in Nigeria be regarded as caused by local governments themselves or the failure of political elites that control the state governments in Nigeria or even part of the general failure of government in Nigeria? The paper also seeks to proffer solutions to the problem of pervasive Machiavellian tactics of the elites of higher levels of government in Nigeria. To achieve this aim and for analytical straightforwardness,

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after the introduction above, the paper is arranged thus: explanation of concepts; democracy and participatory development at the Nigerian grassroots; dividends of democracy and good governance in Nigerian local government areas; pervasive Machiavellian tactics of the elites in the control of Nigerian local governments; implications of elites' pervasive Machiavellian tactics on the control of local government on Nigeria's development and, conclusion and suggestions.

### Explanation of Concepts

**Local Government:** As enunciated by United Nations Office for Public Administration (cited in Tobi, 2015), and adopted in this paper, local government is a sub-division of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such entity is elected or otherwise locally selected. For Nigeria, Section 7 of the 1999 Constitution categorically specified election as the process of recruiting its governing body in order to truly make it a democratic institution.

**Pervasive Machiavellian tactic:** This operates when the elites or princes, so to say, appear as men of compassion, good faith, kind and religious to their citizens whereas their objective is gaining absolute power with the abandonment of conventional morality through diverse methods including circumspection, violence, stratagem (Machiavelli, 2003).

### Democracy and Participatory Development at the Nigerian Grassroots

Institutionally, democracy provides among other things, the citizens equal rights of all adults to vote and stand as candidates for elections (Benjamin, 1998). The success of the right of the people to vote for those who will govern them depends on the leadership that citizens elect (Saracaloolu, 2016). To this extent, it is incumbent on the electorate to sort out by themselves the candidates that demonstrate the interest and ability to deal with the issues and to responsibly govern with the interest of the majority in proper priority (Egbetola & Oyewole, 2022). Local government has its priorities, and must be carried out democratically. That is the essence of Section 7 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). *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.*

The Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) spelt out the socio-political and economic responsibilities of Nigerian local governments, and they border on the welfare of the citizens which is why governments are devised, primarily.

### Dividends of Democracy and Good Governance in Nigerian Local Government Areas

Opinions differ as to what constitutes dividends of democracy among the commentators on the practice of democracy especially in Nigeria. To Waziri (2009), dividends of democracy is derivative of Section 14 (1) (b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), and it is a recent political lexicon that simply connotes the provision of democratic good governance in which fundamental human rights, the rule of law and most importantly, social amenities such as good road network, portable water, well equipped medical facilities, affordable education etc.

According to Ogunyemi (2022), dividends of democracy are not good road, electricity, security, good schools, good dams and bridges and a civil service that will not go on strike. Rather, dividends of democracy are just four: majority rule; popular will and popular sovereignty; freedom of the press and respect for fundamental rights of

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people; and periodic elections. These have been described as the institutional expressions of democracy which offer the citizens the opportunity for political participation by a way of voting for the leaders of their choice along general lines of their policy and enabling those who so minded to devote themselves to political problems as much as they may please (Benjamin, 1998).

To Ogunyemi (2022) what is therefore being regarded as dividends of democracy are rather dividends of good governance. Good roads and other social amenities that promote the welfare of the citizens are not exclusive to democracy as dictatorships also do good roads and better roads. To justify his assertion, he, thus queried that how many of the South East Asian nations were democratic when they achieved greatness and are we going to say that Saudi Arabia is a democratic country? The level of welfare of the citizens there can't be compared with what we have here. What of countries like Brunei, Morocco, Swaziland? What about Libya under Gaddafi and South Africa under FW de Klerk? It is a matter of political class. He averred that as desirable as good roads and electricity are, they are not exclusive to democracy and because we are in a democracy does not mean that the political class will provide all these things.

Leaning on the opinion of Ogunyemi (2022), one can surmise that Section 7 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution provided for provisions of dividends of democracy while the Fourth schedule provided for dividends of good governance provided facilitative factors are made available from both the Federal and State Governments, going by subsections 5, 6, 7 & 8 of Section 162 of 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended).

Given the underdeveloped socio-economic conditions of grassroots areas in Nigeria today, local governments cannot be said to be providing its constitutionally assigned provisions of dividends of good governance. The order of things in Nigeria today is high level insecurity, deepening poverty, rural-urban drift, unemployment, mass alienation, poor governance and corruption among others (Mailafia, 2020). This implies that dividends of good governance are not satisfactorily available at the grassroots level of Nigeria. The causative factor is that the fruits of development in Nigeria is not inclusive as much as possible as it has been appropriated by a small, fortunate politicians at the higher level of Nigerian government (the State Governors and the House of Assembly of States as our leaders are enemies of liberty. This problem is associated with the public ethics of Nigerian political class, which has to do with principled behaviour and purposeful responsibility by those who seek political office (Waziri, 2009). This ethical problem is regarded as elites' pervasive Machiavellian tactic.

### **Elites' Pervasive Machiavellian Tactics on the Control of Local Government**

#### **The Constitutional Perversions**

The Machiavellian tactics that the elites incorporated into the 1999 Constitution rendered local government vulnerable to the whims and caprices of the elites of higher levels of government, especially the State governors. In essence, Nigerian local government system is designed to, based on 1976 local government reform, facilitate local good. This is based on democratic principle as stated in Section 7 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) while the performance of critical development functions which can be tagged dividends of good governance are listed in the Fourth Schedule of the same said constitution. These critical functions include the development, regulation and maintenance of agriculture, natural resources, roads, markets, motor parks, slaughter houses, recreation facilities, water, rural electrification, shopping centres, primary, adult and vocational education, street lights, health centres, security and local commercial ventures and industries. They, in addition, plan, regulate

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or undertake as appropriate bakeries, laundries, outdoor advertising, pets and registration of births, deaths and marriages (Ikelegbe, 2004).

Constitution not only defines the existence and responsibilities as well as the interface between and amongst the various tiers of government, it also constitutes the essential structural foundation of the relations between the governments. This foundation helps in the effort to understand and deal with conflicts and problems that straddle the interface between and among governments in a federation (Aiyede, 2004). To therefore understand the problem that prevents local governments in Nigeria from being agents of providing both dividends of democracy and dividends of good governance to the grassroots citizens, it is imperative to examine the constitutional arrangements and processes put in place in intergovernmental relations affecting local governments in Nigerian federation.

The relationship between local governments and other tiers of government is intergovernmental and of course a product of environment which has interactional patterns and networking between authorities, politicians and administrative personnel. Public officers in this arena seek to build consensus, agreements, consent and support rather than imposition, unilaterality and dictation (Ikelegbe, 2004). This is the ideal. State-local relations in Nigeria is really that of imposition, unilaterality and dictation in respect of observing Section 7 of 1999 Constitution which guarantees dividends of democracy to the grassroots people. The italicised part of Section 7 of 1999 Constitution (as amended): “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*” is Nigerian elites’ Machiavellian tactics of eroding grassroots people’s power of choosing their representatives at the local government level. Often times than not, local government councils are being controlled by caretaker committees appointed by the governors.

Even, when elections were conducted, elections in the local government councils had been overwhelmingly manipulated by the political elites at the state level, and therefore predetermined to be won almost hundred per cent by ruling party in the affected state (Ikelegbe, 2004). State governors indulge in flagrantly violating the constitution on the issue of conduct of local government elections. Consequently, most local government councils are being administered by caretaker committees who are at the beck and call of their benefactors, and this is done with impunity with attendant effects as nepotism, favoritism, neo-patrimonialism, prebendalism and loss of accountability. The non-conduct of elections at local government levels is treacherous to the concept and ideal of democracy (NISER, 2014).

On dividends of good governance, the vigorous development of local government is the only means of realizing the welfare purpose of every progressive State. Welfare services require a flexible technique to cater for individual cases. The local bodies, on account of their nearness to the people, their wider representative character, their natural familiarity with details of the situation, and their intimate knowledge of means and want of the inhabitants are eminently suited to evolve such technique. The State has really found in them its most effective instrument for social amelioration (Kapur, 2014). The Fourth Schedule of 1999 Constitution gives the responsibility of providing dividends of good governance in the grassroots areas to the local governments in Nigeria. But this cannot be done without finance, and has been alienated from the grassroots by the constitution. Section 162 (5) (6) and (8) of 1999 Constitution showcases this:



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Section 162 (5): The amount standing to the credit of local government councils in the federation Account shall also be allocated to the States for the benefit of their local government councils on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly.

Section 162 (6): Each state shall maintain as special account to be called “State Joint Local Government Account” into which shall be paid all allocations to the local government councils of the state from the Federation Account and from the government of the State.

Section 162 (8): The amount standing to the credit of local government councils of a State shall be distributed among the local governments of that State on such terms and in such manner as may be prescribed by the House of Assembly of the State.

The problem is the illegality about the use of local governments’ funds in the operation of State Joint Local Government Account (SJLGA) by the States across the federation. The illegality comes in various forms like over-deduction of primary school teacher’s salaries, spurious state/local government joint projects, sponsoring elections, taking over of statutory functions of local government and handing them over to cronies and consultants, non-payment of pensioners and non-utilization of training funds despite the mandatory deduction of stipulated percentages for this purpose (NISER, 2014). Even, when social amenities such as maternity centres, clinics, toilets, schools are provided, they may not be the needs of communities where they are provided as the projects are tantamount to imposition from the state government through caretaker committees (NISER, 2014). State government organize phoney local government elections that produced predetermined winners from their parties, and who should not complain against the decisions of the state government that may be contrary to the needs of the specific area council. In Afijio local government of Oyo State, the bridge over Itosi River has collapsed three years ago, and proposal for reconstruction went to the state government from the Chairman of the local government. The collapsed bridge has spent decades and it was serving the feeder road that links Ilu-Aje (Ward 10) and Ilora township (Ward 2) of Afijio Local Government area for residential and agricultural purposes. Yet, Oyo State Government in 2021 went ahead to light up Afijio along other parts of Oyo State through street lights when a part of Afijio was in dire need of bridge to service their agricultural economy.

### **Administrative Stratagems**

Given their predatory tendency, the state governments never wanted financial autonomy for local governments and any step towards change of status quo would face attack from the governors. Section 3 (1) (r) of the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU) Act that came into effect in June 1, 2019 limited the daily cash withdrawal from the state/joint account to ₦500, 000.00 in order to reduce crime vulnerabilities created by cash withdrawal from local governments throughout Nigeria. The 36 State Attorneys-Generals and Nigeria Governors Forum (the plaintiffs) challenged this in court through FCH/ABJ/CS/536/2019. The defendants in the suit were Attorney General of the Federation, NFIU and the Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE) and were favored in the judgement given by Justice Inyang Ekwo of a Federal High Court, Abuja by dismissing the claims of the plaintiffs (Ejike, 2022).

The above are apart from state government’s mechanisms put in place to supervise local governments. They include Ministry/Directorate of Local Government, Auditor-General of Local Governments, Deputy Governor’s office, Local Government Service Commission, Zonal Directors of Directorate and Monitoring Units and Ad hoc Committees. They are appointed by the state government and work at the beck and call of state government whose

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controls have been found to be negative in strengthening governance and developments in certain local governments in Nigeria (Ikelegbe, 2004).

### **Implications of Elites' Pervasive Machiavellian Tactics on the Control of Local Government on Nigeria's Development**

The implication of the above is that Nigeria has not prioritized democracy in her development strides. Thus, inclusive participation which democracy promotes is elusive in Nigeria. Then, there is divorce between people and the government at their most basic levels. It is therefore not out of place to aver that the widespread challenges of insecurity in the forms of banditry and kidnapping, which later metastasized into a transnational criminality have been steered by domestic socio-political challenges, among other things (Pogoson, 2024). According to Oriola (2017) Boko Haram is just the most recent in serial organizations in social movement targeted at freeing the masses of Northern Nigeria from the shackles of oppression and debilitating social conditions. Even, very many negative political actions involving Nigerian youths, like those listed above, are attributable to exclusive practices by those in government as it tends to generate a condition of limited upward mobility among the youths (Adeleke, 2024; Hammed).

Especially for the women, by not allowing citizens to vote for the candidates of their choice at the grassroots level due to selection of caretaker committees (these committees scarcely contain women, if at all, in spite of their large number) by state governments, the mobilizational capacity of local government in recruiting citizens for state and national leadership in Nigeria is being stripped. Meanwhile studies have shown that societies with higher levels of women participation and leadership in civil society and political organizations tend to exhibit greater inclusivity, responsiveness, egalitarianism and democratic governance (Pogoson, 2024).

Bureaucratically, the pervasive control the state government unleashes on local government renders civil servants at the local government level 'trapped denizens within their own institution' (Olaopa, 2018: 4) as approval for the execution of local governments' projects, irrespective of the educational level, intelligence and salary grade level of local government civil servants, would have to come from state level. They are being rendered uncivil and servile as they lose formal legitimacy of political rule and effective implementation of the legitimate will of the local populace.

It is also appropriate to state that one other implication of the pervasive Machiavellian tactics or control over local governments in Nigeria is collusion and subversion of developmental state orientation of Nigeria. A developmental state is one "that puts economic development as the top priority of government policy and is able to design effective instruments to promote such goals" (UNECA, 2011, quoted in Mepudin, 2014: 181). Local government is rendered an ineffective instrument of economic development due to collusion (two or more parties work to achieve some economic or other ends usually not in tune with the interests of other excluded parties in a common universe (Mepudin, 2014)) between federal and state government over the financial resources of local governments. Section 162 (5, 6 & 8) clearly demonstrates this. What thus obtains is the subversion (act of deliberate, calculated action to undermine collective interest usually for the purpose of satisfying narrow economic/ or political preferences (Mepudin, 2014)) of the developmental orientation of Nigerian state.

The strength of local government in strengthening democratic institution and creating an enabling environment for socio-economic development, given the above implications, is therefore jaundiced. A nation that thus wishes to harness its demographic potentials, stimulate economic development and prioritize the well-being of citizens

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will not compromise local democratic good governance. Elites' pervasive Machiavellian tactics incorporated into the control of local government in Nigeria substantially compromise local democratic good governance and security of Nigeria and her contiguous neighbors like Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic. This is an indication of bad governance. As Aladejebi (2024) put it, bad governance is a violator of basic human rights of the masses, fosterer of corruption and promoter of improper accountability.

### Conclusion

Our state leaders are, rather than being altruistic, Machiavellians who are best self-interested in milking the socio-economic resources of the society. The Nigerian state elites saw no sense in giving the socio-economic resources of the grassroots people to them for their use, and so employed pervasive tactics in the constitution to erode their political power of autonomously leading themselves. It has been observed right from the 1976 Local Government Reform, and till date remains apt, that:

*Local governments have over the years suffered from the continued witting down of their powers, State governments have continued to encroach upon what would normally have been the exclusive preserve of local governments and subsequently there has been divorce between people and the government at their most basic levels* (quoted in NISER, 2014).

The Nigerian Constitutions, especially 1979 and 1999 provided the means by which the state government can seize local governments from the grassroots people through various provisions that have been highlighted above. Then, it is argued that it is not local governments in Nigeria that have failed in discharging its constitutional responsibilities to the citizens but the political elites at the state level, who are constitutionally empowered to control local government rather than local governments being controlled by the local populace themselves. Similarly, local government failure can also be attributed to the general failure of governments at all levels in Nigeria, especially with regard to ensuring people's welfare as this is the trade mark of Nigerian political class, since sub-sections 5, 6 & 7 of Section 162 of 1999 Nigerian Constitution bifurcated the finances of the local government from Federation Account into the hands of both Federal and State Governments, apart from sub-section 8 which made specific reference to the State Government. This is a hallmark of elites' deviation from altruistic motivations of political action which prevents them from acting for common good. Summarily, several factors may be responsible for the non-actualization of potentials of local governments in promoting dividends of democracy and good governance, the thrust of this paper is that pervasive Machiavellian tactics of the elites stand implicated in Nigeria.

### Suggestions

Making elites of the upper levels of government stay in tandem with altruistic motivations of political actions that will promote their acting for common good is to raise a communal consciousness of individual members and tightening collective bonds that will transform the grassroots-in-itself to the grassroots-for-itself as a way of hijacking local government from self-serving state government leaders. The inbuilt beauty of federalism is the response and adaptation to demands for redress and rectification in social, political and economic structuration which is now known as restructuring in Nigeria (Osaghae, 2019). When elites fail the people, peasants have roles to play in altering the oppressive system. Lessons can be taken from various parts of the world, including the Nigeria's 1969 Agbekoya Revolt over the government's obnoxious pricing of cocoa seeds against the interest of the farmers. Elites who have interest in the development of rural areas for the overall development of the country



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can constitute themselves into anti-hegemonic intellectuals who prepare to rescue the rural people from the exploitative fangs of the ruling class at the upper levels of government who are interested in alienation of the grassroots people from being beneficiaries of dividends of democracy and good governance in Nigeria. This will in long way help in building public ethics politics for the purpose of entrenching local good governance in Nigeria.

Civil society organizations can also help in severing local governments from the cutthroat approach of state level elites. They can provide the necessary social cohesion and political harmony to mobilize people for sustainable rural development. Social cohesion and political harmony can be applied to save local governments from state elites who see local governments as fiefdoms to mine contrary to its objectives. Village or rural communities and Farmers Associations shouldn't stay akimbo as local governments' funds are also meant for agricultural development based on Fourth Schedule (b) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). Rural middle class like successful small-scale farmers and traders and traditional rulers as holders of public office in principle by virtue of community processes, rural industrialists and other members of rural publics can join hands together to salvage local governments from state elites. The involvement of indigenous or rural groups will go a long way in severing local government from state level elites, and make local government truly local in essence.

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