

1 Caretaker Committee System and Democratic Governance in
2 Nigeria's Local Government System: 2003-2014 in Anambra
3 State

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7 **Abstract**

8 The nexus between the local government and democratic governance has been keenly explored
9 on intense academic debates. Recent debates has aimed at beaming attentions on systems
10 such as poor service delivery, lack of accountability, corruption, non-involvement of the people
11 in policy formulation and implementation, poor staffing and total lack of autonomy and by
12 omission leaving out the viral influence of caretaker committees in the debate. The paper
13 therefore, examined this phenomenon by asking the question as to whether the caretaker
14 committee hindered democratic governance in the local government system in Anambra State
15 between the years 2003-2014. The methodology adopted in the study is thematic (i.e. content)
16 analysis. The study revealed that, the use of caretaker committees to run the affairs of the
17 local governments between the years 2003-2014 has been the basic reason for the colossal
18 failures of the grass root development in Anambra State. That the running of the local
19 governments with caretaker committees has had three major negative effects which are: -
20 Political, - Economic, and â???" Social. The paper thus, recommended for a free and
21 transparent election at the grassroot level, devoid of manipulations as was the case in the State
22

23

24 **Index terms**— caretaker committee, democratic governance, local government.
25 Undoubtedly, an efficient and effective local government system ensures a strong developmental base or
26 foundation of any nation. This was supported by Nwachukwu et al (2000) who stated as thus:

27 "Municipal institutions (local governments) constitute the strength of a nation ? A nation may establish a
28 free government, but without municipal institutions it cannot have the spirit of liberty?Man creates kingdoms
29 but townships seems to spring from the hand of God."

30 The position of ??wachukwu et al (2003) actually puts things in the right perspective. It was equally backed
31 by Sir. Arthur Creek as cited by Rowland &Humes (1969) whom in strong terms wrote as follows:

32 "I believe that the key to success lies in the development of an efficient and democratic system of local
33 government. I wish to emphasize the words efficient, democratic and local. I do so not because they import
34 any new concept into African administrations; indeed, they have been the aims of our policy for many years. I
35 use the words because the system of government must be close to the common people ??Local Government] and
36 provide local services in a way which will help raise the standard of living, and be democratic because it must
37 not only find a place for the growing class of educated men, but at the time command the respect and support
38 of the masses of the people".

39 In the words of Sir, Arthur Jones above, it is obvious that for any nation to achieve their aspirations as a
40 developed nation, they would as a matter of fact see the local government system as bedrock. Abonyi (2011) while
41 adding his voice noted that, Nigerians have continually aspired for democracy in the belief that only leaders who
42 are democratically elected [at local governments] can be responsible and responsive to their needs. It is therefore,

1 II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS A) CARETAKER COMMITTEE

43 the disposition of Abonyi that raises the pertinent questions such as; what kind of local government systems are
44 being practiced in Nigeria at present? Why has our leaders suddenly abandoned the option of a democratically
45 elected local government administration and adopted the Caretaker Committee System as a substitute to the
46 constitutional provisions of an elected local government officers. Could it be that the Caretaker System is a
47 better option?

48 It is therefore, the intention of this paper to by method of content or thematic analyses, examine the
49 practice of Caretaker Committee System in Anambra State between 2003-2014 with the aim of ascertaining
50 whether or not the system impacted on the socioeconomic life of the people at the grass root and make relevant
51 suggestions/recommendations.

52 1 II. conceptual clarifications a) Caretaker Committee

53 Historically, the caretaker committee system of local government has no place in the constitution of the Federal
54 Republic of Nigeria. However, its practice is dated as far back as the Nigeria's second republic. Ogunna (1996)
55 noted that during the second Republic in all the States of the Federation, local governments were run by Caretaker
56 Committee System consisting of party loyalists appointed by state governors.

57 Since after its first practice in the second republic, the idea of managing the local governments with the
58 Caretaker Committees has been on the increase in Nigeria. Between 2003-2013, out of the 36 states in Nigeria,
59 25 States have the local governments administered by the Caretaker Committees (Okafor & Orjinta, 2013).

60 Apparently, this increase is as a result of the lacuna created by the 1999 constitution as amended. The
61 constitution did not specify the term of an elected local government council. The Governors then capitalized on
62 these loopholes and turned the local government into an avenue of settling their loyalists.

63 Section 7(1) of the 1999 constitution states thus;

64 "the system of local government by democratically elected government council is under this constitution
65 guaranteed, and accordingly, the government of every state shall subject to section of this constitution ensure
66 their existence under a law which provides for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and function of
67 such councils".

68 Similarly, the section 1(2) also states that;

69 "The federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed, nor shall any person or group of persons take control
70 of the government of Nigeria or any part thereof except in accordance with the provisions of this constitution".

71 Sub-section 3 of the constitution emphatically summarized it by stating it inter-alia;

72 "If any other law is inconsistent with the provisions of this constitution, this constitution shall prevent, and
73 that other law shall to the extent of the inconsistency be void"

74 Notwithstanding the unconstitutionalism of the Caretaker Committees, what is worrisome however, is the
75 reason many state government has resorted to this practice as a panacea to rural development in Nigeria. We
76 believe that in a democracy, leaders should be a product of the choice of the people but that is not the case in
77 this circumstance.

78 Abbas & Ahmad (2012) emphasized that the situation has gotten so embarrassing that even where elections
79 have been conducted, Governors may deliberately force the tenures of local government chairmen to lapse early,
80 so as to pave way for him to appoint loyalists as Caretaker Committees. The primary aim according to him is
81 for the Committees to work towards delivering their local government votes to the ruling party at any point in
82 time thereby for disenfranchising the people.

83 Okafor & Orjinta (2013) supported the above and maintained that the nature of party politics played by the
84 state governors at the local government level in order to maintain power violates democratic principles. This he
85 said hinders the governments from performing their functions, thereby destroying democracy and development
86 from its base. Also, Aluko (2010) argues that a serious point against nominated Committees of management
87 particularly in a civilian regime is that the government in power may misuse the system to keep its supporters
88 indefinitely in control of local government. This is to frustrate the opposition parties and use the interregnum to
89 strengthen its party organizations at the grassroots through patronage which is provided by local governments
90 in the form of contracts, job orders, junior staff appointments and promotions and such appointments touch
91 sensitive positions.

92 Despite the foregoing, Caretaker Committee System is seen as way in which a sitting government especially
93 a state government selects and appoints individuals in most cases of the same political parties, to manage the
94 affairs of the local government.

95 However, the dispositions of writers has been diverse but has not deviated from a general concordance on the
96 unconstitutionality of the Caretakers Committee System. To some, it's a corrupt practice in its totality, to others
97 it's antithetical to constitutional provision and to that extent should not be encouraged in any form and to a few
98 persons; it is good because it has helped the leading parties in various states to keep their strength at the local
99 units intact.

100 According to World Bank Report (1989) on Sub-Saharan Africa: from crises to sustainable growth, sees it
101 "as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resource for
102 development".

103 To Lafenwa (2009) to democratic mode of exercising powers and performing functions by established
104 institutions to achieve developmental goals.

105 However, democratic governance can be understood in terms of the elements it constitutes (Nyewusira & Nweke,
106 2012). Thus, the National League of cities in Lafenwa (2009) defines the concept as "the art of government a
107 community in participatory, deliberative and collaborative ways".

108 Being in total agreement with the perceptions of scholars, it is not an absence of dissimilarity that the concept
109 of democratic governance is not just exercising powers, performing functions or governing the people. For us,
110 democratic governance involves in totality the basic elements of democratic ethos. It can literally be defined as
111 governance of the people by the people, for the people and with the people. In other words if its devoid of the
112 peoples whims and caprices, then its not what it should be and that is in line with the dispositions of Jega(2006).
113 In clearer terms, the constitutive elements can be expressed below;

114 ? Representation: This involves permitting the people to have a choice in choosing their leaders. This idea
115 enables whatever government in power to run a peoples government. ? Participation: The idea here, involves the
116 governments running of the peoples driven policy. In other words involving the people in policy formulation and
117 implementation. ? Response and Accountable Governance: This involves the delivery of services to the people
118 and towns in a way that creates utilitarian value i.e.Policies of government bringing greatest happiness to the
119 greater number of people. ? Egalitarian Society: This involves equality before the law. The people having equal
120 benefits and punishment before the law. Ensuring social justice. ? Transparency and Accountability: The idea
121 involves running an open government that is accountable in the management of public funds.

122 The actualization of these elements goes a long way to measuring the strength of a democratic nature of the
123 government. This is in tandem with the position of Nyesirwa & Nweke (2012) which emphasized that democratic
124 governance is approached by two main pillars of the liberal democratic tradition;-citizen participation in the
125 determination of governing itself and in decision making processes;-and a right "platform" that supports and
126 protects the role of individuals in the governance process.

127 However, a concerned question which the study seeks to unravel is, if these are the tenets of a democratic
128 governance, has the Caretaker Committee formed by the previous regimes in Anambra state from the 2003-2014,
129 lived up to the expectations in the local governments?

130 **2 c) Local Government**

131 Conceptualizing local government, like others in the social sciences, is not easy; it is difficult to have a universally
132 acceptable definition for this concept in developing and developed countries of the world.

133 Consequently, Ovwasa(1995) has opined that the meaning attached to local government varies from country
134 to country and, more frequently; it has become the purpose for which the local government is created. Appadorai
135 (1975)

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138 A programmes and aspirations of the national government at the local level. Thirdly, the ideology of the
139 national governments determines to a large extent the structure and functioning of the local government. Implicit
140 in the foregoing conceptualization, we stressed that the local government could be defined as a tier of government
141 formed to be closer to the people and highly indigenous in such a manner that the people would feel belonged
142 with the government both in policy formulation and implementation. The era of Gov. Obi continued in the same
143 way up to the end of his first tenure in the year 2010. During the Administration of Peter Obi as the governor of
144 Anambra, within the period under review, the Head of Service in all the 21 local government areas in Anambra
145 were used by the State government to manage the affairs of the local government thereby denying the people
146 the right to participate in their own local governance. This therefore not only politicized the Civil Servants but
147 negatively impacted on the lives of the rural dwellers as no meaningful developmental projects were executed
148 within the period. The local government funds were mismanaged by these officers. Sometimes contracts will
149 be awarded but will not be executed while the contract fund was shared between the minority and the council
150 officials. In the second tenure he made a lot of promises to conduct election in the local government which was
151 never fulfilled up till the penultimate of his second tenure when he conducted a flanked local government election
152 since 2003 on the 6th February, 2014. This was because the election was not only massively rigged but results
153 were announced even where election did not take place. Thus, the local government in Anambra state has passed
154 through numerous Caretaker Committee Regimes.

155 The study therefore would examine the travails of local governments, in Anambra State local government's
156 systems under the following implications;? Political effects ? Economic effects ? Social effects.

157 Political Effects: Jega (2006) clearly emphasized that one of the basic constitutive elements of democratic
158 governance is that of representation. Representation according to him is the people having freedom to choose by
159 themselves who represents or governs them in leadership through a free and fair election. Under the Caretaker
160 Committee leadership, the case is usually a dominance of the leading political party. In fact between 2003-2014,
161 it was not on record at any time when a governor appoints a member of an opposition party within the state as
162 a member of Caretaker Committee.

163 To such leading political parties, the party is growing stronger and waxing their political popularity and

6 IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

164 acceptance at the grass root, while throwing away the real reason of basic dividends of democratic governance
165 by allowing a participatory leadership where even a minority would have a say.

166 On the other hand, it has been discovered that the Committees only pay allegiance to the political class
167 and had weaken the democratic structures at local level in Anambra State from 2003-2014. While writing
168 on "the Challenges of Democratic Governance in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria" Ogbonnaya et al ??2012)
169 emphasized that the weakness of democratic institution is a challenge to democratic governance. They referred
170 to the institutions as the executive, judiciary, the legislature. But of obvious fact is the reality that these
171 institutions can only function effectively in an elected democratic structure especially at the local government
172 level, which Caretaker Committee appointments do not encourage, this is also a negation of the provision of the
173 1999 construction of Nigeria as amended which provides for a democratically elected government at the grassroot
174 level which will encourage citizens participation.

175 Economic Effects: Unarguable is the fact that the Caretaker Committees are not elected and therefore the
176 pre-requisite institution that could serve as checks and balances are non existence, the members therefore see it
177 as an avenue to loot the local government and enrich themselves with the public funds.

178 The empirical study of ??kafor & Orjinta (2012), specifically in Onitsha North local government area revealed
179 that there is a unanimous agreement on the lack of impact of Caretaker Committees on improving the living
180 conditions in the area. The Committee members lamented that they only receive salary at the end of the month
181 which is paid only when the governor approves it.

182 Between 2003-2014, local governments in Anambra state have not witnessed any serious

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184 Volume XV Issue I Version I () A economic development. The colossal failure of the Committees gears to the fact
185 that they are at the mercy of the state government. In most cases they are being referred to as watch dogs. For
186 example in Ayamelum local government which consists of eight communities, the communities never witnessed
187 any project done by the local government between this period under review and that is applicable to the rest of
188 the local government in the state.

189 5 Social Effects:

190 The social implication has to do with the quality of relationship that exists between the Caretaker Committee
191 members and the career civil servants even the people at large. However, the relationship has been that of
192 "master-servant" relationship with the reason not farfetched. Since they merely represent the presence of the
193 governor at the local government level, they are seen as 'semi gods' due to the fact that whatever happens, their
194 godfather would come to their rescue.

195 It was discovered that between 2003-2014, the local government do not have any social contract with the
196 masses. Evidence is the fact that no meaningful project was executed and commissioned by any Caretaker
197 Committee regime. The underlying fact therefore is the fact that it negates egalitarian society which is one of the
198 constitutive elements of democratic governance according to Jega (2006). Jega expressed egalitarian society as a
199 constitutive element of democratic governance. To him, it encourages, constitutional regime, fairness, economic
200 and social justice.

201 6 IV. conclusion and recommendations

202 From the analysis so far presented, democratic governance under the Caretaker Committees in local governments
203 in Anambra state between 2003-2014 to us is "a wild goose chase", problematic and threatened by internal and
204 external variables. That is to say, that the sustenance of local government administration on the basis of caretaker
205 committees is apparently responsible for the weak democratic ethos and perennial underdevelopment of the local
206 government in Anambra state, 2003-2014.

207 This failure of democratic governance is explained, in the fact that the dominant party imposes politics of
208 transaction rather than transformation in the conduct of public affairs at the local government level (Nyesirwa &
209 Nweke, 2012). Their position was in line with Okafor & Orjinta (2013) who emphasized that the local government
210 Caretaker Committees is simply an experiment towards the scrapping of the local government and is, in practice
211 an extension of the party in power.

212 On this basis, we recommended that; local governments should be exposed to competitive elections, political
213 and financial autonomy that is in commensurate with her status as the third tier of government.

214 We believe that it's only through a thorough democratic institution that the local government can thrive in
215 her quest for development at the local level.

216 The local government should be strengthened constitutionally; this would enable the removal of the clauses that
217 makes the local government to be at the mercy of the state government. Immediate removal of the joint account
218 between the State and local government so that the revenue base of the local government will be strengthened.

219 Finally, the introduction of Caretaker Committees as a basis of recruiting public officers at the local government
220 level should be discouraged, hence efforts should be made to ensure the enthronement of a democratic government



Figure 1:

221 at the local government level, as this is the only measure that will enhance the development of the rural areas.
222 1 2

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