

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION: A SOCIO-
POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STUDY OF
NIGERIA AND CHINA**

BY

Samuel Nnadi

Department of Political Science, FUNAI,
Ebonyi State, Nigeria

Ndukwe Kalu

Department of Political Science,
Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

Allens Umunna Iheonu

Department of Political Science,
Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: jenallens2k3@gmail.com

Raymond Nwapi

Department of Political Science,
Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

Ogadinma Ikonne

Department of Sociology,
Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria

Abstract

The study is a comparative analysis of the workings of local government administration in Nigeria and China. The study argued that globalisation, urbanisation, regionalisation, technological innovation, and participatory planning are the major challenges of local government works. Since local

government world over is designed to serve as an instrument for grass-root development and bringing government nearer to the people for the purpose of their maximum participation in the development of local communities; this major challenge to the workings of local government should be handled with utmost care to ensure that local areas are developed to avoid unmitigated migration to the urban cities. To ensure proper participation of the local people, local government are built with the act of decentralizing power either through devolution of power or delegation of power to the lowest level of government. With this in mind, the socio-political and administrative structures of local government in Nigeria and China were examined to provide the basis of how these instruments operate to differentiate single and multi-tier structures and how the administrative structure relate to the political system that are important to the mitigation of the challenges of local government. The study was anchored on Expo Facto Research Design. The theoretical underpinning of the study was a combination of Institutional Theory and Decentralisation Theory. The method of data collection employed by the study was Secondary Data Collection while the instrument of data analysis deployed by the study was Relational Content Analysis.

Keywords: Administration, Comparative Study,
Decentralisation, Institutionalisation, Inter-
Governmental Relations.

Introduction

Recent developments put phenomena, such as globalisation, urbanisation, regionalisation, technology innovation, democracy and participatory planning as major challenges for local government works (Dentres and Rose, 2005). In this regard, globalization relates to openness in various aspects including labour, commodities and capital exchanges that

pressure local governments to improve their capacity, capability and knowledge, especially in delivering services on such exchange activities (Ocampo, 2010). Urbanisation, is linked with urban sprawling (Itall and Jones, 2010), and high concentration of urban population, in which local governments need to improve their performance to manage more comprehensive and dynamic economic and social urban issues (Denters and Rose, 2005).

The other three challenges, regionalisation refers to the recent growth of cross-boundary initiatives and commitments that lead local governments to deal with wider cross-boundary issues (Kidokoro *et al*, 2008). Meanwhile, technological innovation can be seen, at least, from the presence of technology such as internet and computer as being crucial for local government administration. As for democracy and participatory planning, they have strong emphasis on how local government can implement such community involvements on their programmes (Turner, 2014).

Administration aims at educating, enlightening and exposing the practitioners and students of local governments to the evolution, developments, principles, practices, and theories used in studying local government, it's place in government, it's relationship with other governments, source of revenue for its operation, the practices and changes it witnessed across the globe. In this work, we are using Nigeria and China, as a case study of analysis. It is established that local government world over is designed to serve as an instrument for grassroots development and bringing government nearer to the people for the purpose of their maximum participation for the development of local communities.

In practical terms, local government is the closet tier of government to the people in any system of government. In the unitary system, power is devolved from the central

government to the local government. In a federal system, power is shared among federal, state and local government. Local government, therefore, is a form of decentralisation of power either through devolution or delegation of power to the lowest level of government. On this note, the political and administrative structures of local government in Nigeria and China will be examined to provide the basis on how these instruments operate to differentiate single and multi-tier structures and how the administrative structure relates to the political system.

Theoretical Framework

This study will be anchored on two theories – Institutional Theory and Decentralisation Theory.

Institutional Theory: According to Science Direct, Com (2026), Institutional Theory examines the structures, norms and practices that influence organisations and societies. It zeroes in and explains why organisations and institutions in similar fields often become isomorphic, that is, that they adopt similar structures to gain approval and survive within their environment. In line with this, Nur (2025) states that Institutional theory plays a vital and central role in local government administration by explaining how formal rules, informal norms, and cultural cognitive frames shape organisational behaviour, structure, and decision-making. Institutional theory posits that local governments do not operate merely to achieve technical efficiency but to attain legitimacy within their environment by adopting “taken-for-granted” structures and processes, a process known as institutionalisation. To Vandeboncoeur and Jennifer (2025), Institutional theory explores how social and institutional contexts shape the behaviour of organisations, professions, and other entities and establishments within society. It emphasises the importance of external and internal influences

on institutions such as local government, considering how social norms and structures guide individuals and collective actions. It went further to state that institutional theory posits two main frameworks: the “environment as an institution” which focuses on conformity to external pressures, and the “organisation as an institution” which examines internal routines and practices. The theory maintains that institutionalisation occurs when individual actions become formalized into established routines that significantly influence interactions and operations within institutions.

Decentralisation Theory: Decentralisation theory on the other hand, according to Faguet (2021) is the devolution of power, authority, responsibility and resources by the central government to lower-level, local or peripheral entities of government. Decentralisation theory, according to Dick-Sagoe (2020), states that transferring authority, responsibility, and resources from central government to sub-national or local levels enhances efficiency, accountability, and citizen participation. It seeks to solve the problems of overloaded central systems by bringing decision-making to the people. So, in effect, decentralisation aims to improve administrative efficiency, enhance local participation, and tailor public services to local needs.

The two theories, Institutional Theory and Decentralisation Theory, are suitable as the theoretical framework for this study as both of them posit ways and manners by which local government can be institutionalised and very effective and efficient in ensuring the development of the local levels and entities of a country.

Calls for Local Government Reforms

Local government reforms are what academics, politicians, or even communities expect from the national government. It is

believed that contemporary approach that relies on top-down system, in which local government only works as administrative hands of national governments, is no longer relevant. Denters and Rose (2005) highlight strong perspectives about the importance of more sophisticated local governments as active local decision makers dealing with complex local and cross boundaries in this era. It is all about shifting from traditional government to modern government. Obviously, local governments are expected to deliver more effective and efficient management system, and service provision. Such improvements are the principle objectives of local government.

Local Government in Nigeria

Nigerian local government structure is made up of 774 local government areas, each with its own council. The local governments are the third tier of government in Nigeria, below the federal and the state governments. Local government is constitutionally entrenched as an order of government alongside the federal and state governments. The Constitution requires all states to enact legislation providing for the establishment, structure, composition, finance and functions of local government councils. The legitimacy of the local government councils as a tier of government is derived from the 1999 Constitution which states that:

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.

Local governments are thus creatures of statute. The Constitution provides for the procedure for the creation of new local governments. The rationale for the constitutional recognition arose out of the need to make it obligatory on the state government to ensure the existence of democratically elected local government councils, to guarantee their functions and to direct the effective utilisation of funds allocated to them from federal revenue.

Composition, powers and functions of local government

Local governments in Nigeria operate a presidential system of government with two political institutions: the legislature and the executive. The legislature is composed of councilors, who are elected to make laws. The legislature makes all the laws for the proper administration and good governance of the local government area. The executive consists of the Chairman, Secretary and Supervisory Councilors. The Chairman is elected by the people. The Chairman appoints the Secretary and Supervisory Councilors, who are not members of the legislatures. In other words, separation of powers is practiced at the local government level. Each local government in the country operates on the basis of separation of powers between the executive and the legislature.

As an institution of development, local government power could be inferred from section 7(3) of the 1999 Constitution as an organ of government to "participate in economic planning and development" in its area of jurisdiction. Local governments can exercise their powers to enact by-laws for:

- The economic development of the local government areas;
- Rates, levies, and other statutory charges;

- Employing and disciplining junior staff of the council; and
- The good governance of the local government.

While core functions of local government are defined in the Constitution, individual states may augment their responsibilities through legislation. The functions of local government are provided for in Schedule 4 of the 1999 Constitution. There are functions that local government share with other tiers of government, especially the state governments. These include the provision and maintenance of primary, adult and vocational education; agricultural and natural resource development (this does not include exploitation of mineral resources); and the provision and maintenance of health services and such other functions as may be assigned to local governments by the State House of Assembly (Dullah Omar Institute, 2026).

Some functions are made mandatory for local governments and for these they have sole responsibility. The consideration and making of recommendations to the state commission on Economic Planning or any similar body on the economic development of the state, particularly insofar as the area of authority of the council and the state are affected, as well as proposals made by the said commission or body, is one such function. The collection of rates on radio and television licenses is another. There are numerous others.

In practice, however, local governments are mere agents of the state governments. State governments regard the shared functions as a list of permissive functions, which they allow local governments to perform under supervision if they have the resources to perform them. State governments lay down policy and exercise administrative control over the quality and quantity of services to be delivered but leave the

responsibility for funding to local governments which lack the resources to do so adequately. The constitution does not give local governments clear mandates on key local functions such as local development planning, primary education, health services. Their role in economic development planning is to make recommendations to states' agency for economic planning. With such unclear mandates, local governments have had an uphill task resisting state interference in local functions (Dullah Omar Institute, 2026).

Financing the governance role of local government

Local governments' expenditure responsibilities are financed largely through statutory allocations from the federal government, with local governments regularly receiving about 20% of total revenues in the divisible pool called the Federation Account. Since oil revenues are part of the Federation Account, local governments receive substantial revenues on account of this statutory allocation. Local governments are also entitled to a share of federally collected VAT revenues (outside of the Federal Account). The share is determined by the National Assembly upon advice by the National Mobilisation, Allocation and Fiscal Commission. In addition, states are mandated to allocate 10% of their internally generated revenue to local governments within their jurisdiction.

It is required that each state government and local governments in the state should maintain a special account called the Local Government' Account, into which is paid such funds to be applied for joint purposes as may be prescribed by the State or the National Assembly. Each state is expected to pay the local governments in its area of jurisdiction a proportion of its own revenue (that is, excluding the sums received from the Federal Account) (Obodo, 2017).

Local governments have original taxing powers. Four tax sources fall within their legal and administrative jurisdiction:

- Licenses and fees on television and wireless radio;
- Market and trending licenses and fees;
- Car park duties;
- Advertising fees.

In practice, only one tax source (markets) is exploited by local government. Interestingly, even the tax source universally considered a local tax, namely property taxes and rating, is in reality under the legal jurisdiction of the state. It is quite obvious that in Nigeria, the local governments depend largely on the Federation Account to finance their activities. The reason for the heavy dependence on fiscal transfers from external sources is the nature of the taxes assigned to local governments. The revenue sources that fall under the jurisdiction of local government are non-buoyant and inelastic. They cannot yield sufficient revenue to make significant impact on the structure of local finance. In Nigeria, therefore, local government expenditure constantly surpasses the potentials for revenue sources owing to the great gulf between their needs and their fiscal capacity (Sanni, 2020; Ezeani, 2025).

Intergovernmental relations

The federal government still exercises both constitutional and statutory responsibility over local government administration through the creation of new local government through the normal processes of constitutional amendment, making provisions for statutory allocation of public reserve to the governments of the federation; establishing a National

Electoral Commission or the purposed organising democratic election at all levels, including local government elections, establishing the code of conduct bureaus for all public offices, including local government functionaries, to declare their asserts, and exercising unfettered powers through the National Assembly to make laws at the federation or any part thereof including any local government area. The federal-local government relations have so far been very cordial.

However, in state-local government relations, there has been cold war. Local governments complain about undue interference from state governments. In addition, local government chairmen have argued that state governors; (especially where a chairman comes from a party different from a Governor's) plot to remove them by using the audit powers of the state. State governors have also been accused of conspiring/colluding with the State Houses of Assembly to shorten the tenure of elected local government officials from three years in order to put their supporters in office. However, many governors claim that a majority of chairmen and councilors of local governments only sit down to share money drawn from the Federation Account and hardly embark on development projects. In addition, the governors are angry that the Federal Government relates directly with local government councils that operate under them (Iheonu and Alozie, 2021).

The three common problem areas in the relations between state and local governments are finance, functions and staffing. On finance, state governments routinely hijack varying proportions of the allocations to local governments from the Federation Account. Furthermore, many state governments usurp local government avenues of generating internal revenues and fail to contribute the required proportion of their internally generated revenues into the State - Local Government Joint Account for sharing among local

governments, contrary to the provisions in the 1999 Constitution. In addition, there is a degree of overlap of functions among the tiers of government, especially in the implementation of such national policies as primary health care, primary education, water and sanitation. This has, in some cases, resulted in duplicated efforts and acrimony amongst government functionaries on authority over certain functions and attendant waste of public funds.

Local Government in China

Local governments in China operate with a hierarchical system of bureaucratic control in which each level of government has to be accountable to the next higher level, and provincial governments must accept the unified leadership of the state council. The system is buttressed by the party's nomenclatural system tightly controlling the appointments of officials at all levels; local government officials do not have to be answerable to voters, but they have to undergo detailed performance assessments annually by their superiors within the party systems. Local governments in China assume a significant role in economic development. They own enterprises and also compete against each other. For example, they all try to attract more foreign investment. Chinese people are increasingly concerned with environmental pollution, food, security, health care reforms, education reforms etc.

Local government in China refers to the local parties and government systems in a broad sense. The main subjects include - the party committees, local governments, and their subordinate administrative functional departments, and various groups and organisations under the leadership of the party committees. Local government in China shows that Chinese political system is more than a mere copy or extension of structures and mechanisms found at higher levels of the governmental hierarchy. Although Chinese local

bureaucracies have to obey the upper levels-prefectures, provinces and the center; they still have substantial maneuvering space to shape the implementation of policies and to determine the political system's capacity to deliver meaningful outcomes (Ahlers, 2014).

Local governments in China also increasingly rely on development of the private sector and public-private partnerships-a distinct shift in local governance modes over those in the recent past. Since the early Hu-Wen administration, the fostering of private entrepreneurship has become an important component in the overall approach to the rural-urban integration of local governments. It shapes the local economy by setting priorities in the conversion of scarce land to commercial use, encouraging the development of new product brands and trademarks, providing access to market information, and pushing forward the implementation of environmental standards. Consequently, government interaction and cooperation with private entrepreneurs has also become a crucial feature of local government and effective policy implementation in contemporary China.

In China, the private sector is a pivotal component of local economic policies, even more so today, as only a few sectors are the exclusive domain of state-owned enterprises (such as energy, tobacco, crude oil, etc.) and private investment is urgently needed to develop a locality. Recently, the central leadership emphasised that without developing the private sector, the "Chinese Dream" could not be realised, and that this sector is the most crucial force of innovation (State Council, 2017). Moreover, quantitative economic development is still the most important indicator for assessing the performance of leading cadres and deciding on their individual career trajectories. Particularly in the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008/09, with its negative impact on the Chinese export economy, local governments have

tightened their private sector policies to bring about structural change in the local economy, a precondition for more taxes and better public goods provision. Local governments invest continuously in the development of the local infrastructure, communications, and the public goods crucial for private enterprise, such as local development zones, special service centers for small and medium-sized enterprises, and schemes calculated to attract skilled labour and professionals. They also organise vocational training for enterprise personnel, provide information on marketing strategies and new models of business administration, grant money for 'product innovation', and set up communication channels between private enterprises and government bureaus to help them resolve all sorts of technical and financial problems. Moreover, local governments provide financial support for firms with economic difficulties, most notably by adjusting their tax burden.

The entire range of measures undertaken by local governments strongly impacts on private entrepreneurship in their respective jurisdictions: they grant subsidies and earmarked funding, allocate land and land use rights, act as intermediaries in negotiating bank loans for private enterprises, provide the infrastructure for a sound business environment (e.g., access to major transportation routes, well-equipped development zones, etc.) and attract skilled labour and private investment (chaoshang yinzi) to expand existing local businesses or set up new enterprises. At the same time, local governments can, and do force, private entrepreneurs to voluntarily support specific policies or projects with money. It is of great importance to note here that local governments expect them to 'donate' money to important local initiatives, often in the fields of poverty alleviation and public goods provision such as the building of new schools or health-care facilities. Local governments even make contacts with private

entrepreneurs, who have moved their companies and now operate in other localities, to persuade them to invest in their native places. For their part, entrepreneurs (whether party members or not) cannot but bind themselves closely to the Party State, from which they expect political protection and support. Of course, regional differences and development trajectories produce different state-business relations, and the more important the private sector economy has become for a given locality, the greater the bargaining power of private entrepreneurs vis-à-vis local governments, possibly even culminating in government capture (Schubert and Heberer, 2017).

In addition to steering the political agency of private entrepreneurs by controlling their much-needed economic resources, local governments also dominate local trade and industrial branch associations (shanghui, hangye xichui). None of these are autonomous interest organisations that represent private enterprises or entrepreneurs. On the one hand, they function as transmission belts to help the Party State so as to maintain its political supremacy over the private sector, and on the other hand they act as mediators between private entrepreneurs and local governments, for example, when labor issues are at stake. Their principal task is to provide for a steady flow of communication between local governments and private entrepreneurs in order to ensure continuous economic development and market expansion to the benefit of the local economy. At the same time, however, entrepreneurs often prefer to communicate informally with the relevant government bureaus and local officials, whom they know personally, to solve their problems and rarely rely on business associations to assist them. Associational autonomy, it seems, is not possible in an authoritarian system where the factors of production - labour, capital and land are closely monitored by the state, and private entrepreneurship is

perpetually co-opted by governments at each and every administrative tier. Yet, private entrepreneurs pursue strategies of their own for influencing policies, mostly by means of lobbying, networking through chat groups, joining entrepreneurial clubs, setting up informal chambers of commerce, or working as delegates of formal organisations (e.g. Local People's Congresses and Political Consultative Conferences) (Schubert and Heberer 2017).

But Party State control also becomes increasingly organised within the private sector itself. In most of the larger private enterprises, we came across party organisations which were often headed by the founder and boss of the company or a leading manager. The success of this policy is ambivalent at best. Party cells may arguably facilitate the communication of local development policies at the company level, although it is difficult to discern precisely how these processes work out, because they are highly informal and lack transparency. But it is a reasonable assumption that party organisations within private enterprises are useful tools for controlling leading company staff and implementing official policies related to private sector development.

No matter how local private entrepreneurship initially emerged, local governments in all the places that we studied provided effective leadership and guidance for the private sector, resulting in a rather hierarchic mode of governance. This, contributes positively to effective policy implementation within the existing context in contemporary China. The local state enjoys sufficient autonomy from the private sector, which exclusively controls the access to land, funding public projects, information and although more circumspectly, credit, and therefore can and does bring entrepreneurial interests most notably, profit increase and company expansion, into line with its specific goals to develop the local economy. At the same time, local state supremacy helps to mobilise private

capital, making up for insufficient financial resources (due to the discriminatory tax system), helping local governments to provide public goods, and funding poverty alleviation programmes, which has now once again become a priority national policy area (Schubert and Heberer, 2017).

Conclusion

Local governments in Nigeria are still in the process of evolution. Nigeria has gone through the pre-colonial and colonial era through to military rule and democracy and each of these phases has had significant impacts on local government. The manner in which Local Government Areas were created and distributed by past military administrations has been a source of great acrimony and disharmony. There are now strong agitations for reform of the local government system.

Chinese local governments operate with an authoritarian one party state with a high degree of top-down political control and initiative noting that the local tiers of the Chinese party and government bureaucracy have plenty of opportunities to shape, steer as well as implementation of policies.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that Nigeria and China share a hierarchical structure with both local governments accountable to higher levels, and both are responsible for delivery services and implementing policies at the local level. However, the local governments in both countries operate differently in terms of resources management within their jurisdictions, including land, infrastructure and local revenue.

Furthermore, both local government structures also operate differently in terms of political system as China is a unitary communist state, with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) playing a dominant role, while that of Nigerian is a federal

republic with a democratic system. Administratively, the structures and organisational models of local governments differ, with China having a unique system of people's congress and local governments. In the area of economic development Chinese local governments play a more active role in economic planning than that of Nigeria. Lastly, both local governments enjoy a degree of autonomy but decision making power of local governments varies significantly.

References

- Ahlers, A. L. (2014). Rural policy implementation in contemporary China: New Socialist Countryside. London: Routledge.
- Ahlers, A.L. (2015). Weaving the Chinese dream on the ground: Local government approaches to “New-Type” rural urbanisation. *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 20(2): 121-142.
- Denters, B. and Rose, L. E. (2005). Comparing local governance: Trends and developments, New York: Palgrave McMillian.
- Dick-Sagoe, C. (2020). Decentralisation for improving the provision of public service in developing countries: A critical review. Taylor and Francis Online. <https://www.tandfonline.com> Accessed 9th April, 2020, 8.58 pm.
- Dullar Omar Institute (2026). Local Government in Nigeria. <https://dullahomarinstitute.org.za> Accessed 25th April 2026, 7.26 pm.
- Ezeani, U. (2025). Taxing powers in Nigeria: constitutional framework. <https://papers.ssm.com> Accessed 25th April, 2026, 11.50 am.
- Faguet, J. P. (2021). Understanding decentralisation theory, evidence and method. <https://www.econstor.eu> Accessed 9th April, 2020, 12.27 pm.

- He, X (2007). New rural reconstruction and the Chinese path. *Chinese Sociology and Anthropology* 39(4).
- Heinelt, B. H. (2021). Interessenvermittlung in China (Local governance and administrative interest mediation in China). In *moderns regieren in China (Modern governing in China)*, (ed.) Heinelt. Baden-ben, H: Nomos, 89-115.
- Iheonu, Allens Umunna, PhD and Alozie, Cyprian C. PhD (2021). *Intergovernmental relations: An expository survey*. Okigwe: Excellent PrintProduction Enterprise.
- Kidokoro, T. (2008). *Sustainable cities and regions: Space, place and governance*, Tokyo: Springer.
- Nur, A. Y. P. (2025). *Institutional Theory in Simplifying Local Government Bureaucracy*. <https://www.atlantis-press.com> Accessed 15th April, 2026, 7.00 am.
- Ocampo, J. A. (2010). *Public sector governance and accountability series: Local Government in Developing Countries*, Washington: World Bank.
- Obodo, N. A. (2017). *Local Government financing* <https://eprints.goun.edu.ng> Accessed 25th April, 2026, 11.20 am.
- Ocampo, J. A. (2010). Rethinking global economic and social governance; *Journal of Globalisation and Development*. Vol.1. 1-6.
- Sanni, A. O. (2020). Division of taxing powers under the 1999 Constitution. <https://ir.unilagrepository.edu.ng> Accessed 25th April 2026, 11.44 am
- Schubert, G. and Heberer, T. (2015). Private entrepreneurs as a “strategic group” in the Chinese polity. *The China Review* 17(2): 95-122.
- Science Direct, Com (2026). *Institutional Theory: An Overview*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com> Accessed

8th April, 2026, 8.12 am.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999
(2011). Government Press, Abuja

Turner, A. H. (2014). Substance participation: A model of
public participation that works for citizens and
administrators. *International Journal of Public
Administration*, 37:12, 885-894.

Vadeboncoeur, L. R. and Jennifer, A. (2025). Institutional
Theory: Sociology–Research Starters. [https://www
.ebsco.com](https://www.ebsco.com) Accessed 8th April, 2026, 8.28 pm.