

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL AUTONOMY AFTER THE 2024 SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR GRASSROOTS SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Local government financial autonomy remains an important issue in Nigeria because the control of local government funds has affected the ability of councils to perform their responsibilities and deliver services to local communities. This study examines local government financial autonomy after the 2024 Supreme Court judgment and its implications for grassroots service delivery in Nigeria. The study adopted a documentary review design and examined 19 selected sources comprising journal articles, legal documents, institutional reports, and relevant post-judgment materials. Sources were selected based on their relevance to local government financial autonomy, decentralization, service delivery, and the implementation of the Supreme Court judgment. The selected materials were examined through qualitative thematic analysis, focusing on the post-judgment legal position, practical implementation of financial autonomy, financial management, accountability, and implications for grassroots service delivery. The review found that the most clearly established change after the judgment is the stronger legal basis for democratically elected local governments to receive and control their statutory allocations. However, the available evidence also shows continuing implementation difficulties and does not provide sufficient evidence to establish widespread improvements in healthcare, education, infrastructure, employment, or other service-delivery outcomes since the judgment. The findings further indicate that direct financial control can create greater opportunity for local councils to respond to community needs, but this opportunity depends on effective financial management, institutional capacity, accountability, and compliance with the Court's decision. The study concludes that the 2024 judgment has strengthened the legal foundation for local government financial autonomy, but its actual contribution to grassroots service delivery remains inconclusive. Further empirical research using comparable financial and service-delivery indicators is therefore needed to determine whether the post-judgment changes have produced measurable improvements across local governments in Nigeria.

Keywords: Local government, financial autonomy, Supreme Court judgment, grassroots service delivery, decentralization.

Introduction

Local government is recognized as the third tier of government in Nigeria and is expected to bring governance and public services closer to the people. Its responsibilities include areas that directly affect everyday life, such as primary healthcare, basic education, rural roads, water supply, sanitation, and other community services. The ability of local governments to perform these functions, however, depends not only on their constitutional responsibilities but also on the financial resources available to them and the extent to which they can control those resources. Financial autonomy has remained a major concern in Nigeria's local government system. Although the Constitution recognizes local government councils, the operation of the State Joint Local Government Account under Section 162 has allowed state governments to exercise considerable influence over local government finances. Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024) observed that financial control and state interference have weakened the capacity of many local governments to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Fagbemi et al. (2025) similarly argued that meaningful financial autonomy is necessary for local governments to respond to the needs of their communities. These concerns are not new, and several studies have already examined the relationship between financial autonomy, local government performance, and grassroots development. A major development in this debate occurred on 11 July 2024, when the Supreme Court delivered its judgment in *Attorney General of the Federation v. Attorney General of Abia State & 35 Others*. The Court held that funds due to local governments from the Federation Account should be paid directly to democratically elected local government councils and should not be withheld or controlled by state governments (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2024). Onanuga (2024) described the decision as an important development in the constitutional relationship between the three levels of government. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG, 2024) also noted that the judgment could strengthen the financial position of local governments and give practical meaning to their constitutional responsibilities.

The judgment, however, does not by itself establish that local government financial autonomy will lead to better service delivery. Existing studies had already made similar arguments before the judgment. Bappi et al. (2026) found that financial autonomy can support local government performance when it is accompanied by proper budgeting, accountability, and monitoring. Ezo et al. (2026) also found that access to financial resources is important for the implementation of local development initiatives. These findings provide useful evidence about the relationship between financial resources and local government performance, but they do not show what has actually happened across Nigeria following the 2024 judgment. This creates an important gap in the

existing literature. Much of the earlier discussion has focused on why local governments need financial autonomy and the problems created by state control. Less attention has been given to the post-judgment situation, particularly the gap between the legal position established by the Supreme Court and its practical implementation by state and local government institutions. Tunji et al. (2026) reported continuing disputes over the control of local government allocations two years after the judgment. This raises questions about the extent to which the Court's decision has translated into actual financial independence and whether the expected benefits for local service delivery can be realized. The issue also requires a balanced assessment. Direct access to public funds may give local councils greater room to plan and implement projects according to community priorities. At the same time, greater financial independence may have limited effect where councils lack adequate financial management capacity, effective oversight, or transparent systems for using public resources. Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024) identified weaknesses in financial control as a continuing challenge, while Fagbemi et al. (2025) emphasized that autonomy must be supported by responsible management of public resources. The post-judgment debate therefore involves not only access to funds but also how those funds are managed and whether they are converted into meaningful local services.

The relevance of this study lies in its focus on the period following the 2024 Supreme Court judgment, when the legal position on local government financial autonomy has changed but questions remain about its practical implementation. While previous studies have examined financial autonomy, local government performance, and grassroots development, this study brings these issues together within the post-judgment context. Its contribution is therefore not to claim that financial autonomy is a new issue, but to examine how the judgment has changed the conditions under which local governments manage their finances and the implications this may have for grassroots service delivery. The study also considers the political, institutional, and administrative challenges that may prevent the legal decision from producing the expected outcomes. The study is guided by Decentralization Theory, which provides a basis for understanding how the transfer of financial authority closer to local communities may affect local governance and service delivery. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the implications of the 2024 Supreme Court judgment for local government financial autonomy; assess the opportunities created by direct access to local government funds for grassroots service delivery; and examine the major political, institutional, and administrative challenges affecting the implementation of financial autonomy after the judgment.

Against this background, the paper examines the implications of the 2024 Supreme Court judgment for local government financial autonomy and grassroots service delivery in Nigeria. Rather than assuming that the judgment has already produced improved development outcomes, the study examines available post-judgment evidence, considers the opportunities created by greater financial control, and identifies the factors that may limit effective implementation. In doing so, the paper provides a focused assessment of the emerging post-2024 situation and contributes to the continuing discussion on local government finance and service delivery in Nigeria.

Literature Review

i. Local Government Financial Autonomy and Service Delivery

Financial autonomy is an important part of local government administration because it determines the extent to which councils can control resources and make spending decisions according to local priorities. In Nigeria, however, the ability of local governments to exercise this authority has been affected by state control over their finances and the operation of the State Joint Local Government Account. Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024) observed that these financial control problems have weakened the capacity of local governments to perform their responsibilities effectively. The literature generally supports a connection between financial autonomy and local government performance, but the evidence is not entirely uniform in its emphasis. Fagbemi et al. (2025) argued that local government autonomy is necessary for effective administration because councils need sufficient control over their resources to respond to community needs. Shola and Saka (2026) similarly linked financial autonomy with grassroots development. These studies provide a strong argument for greater financial independence, but their focus is largely on the need for autonomy rather than on what happens after a specific legal intervention.

Bappi et al. (2026) provide a more empirical perspective from Yamaltu/Deba Local Government Area in Gombe State. Their findings indicate that financial autonomy can improve local government performance through better resource use and greater capacity to implement development projects. However, the study is limited by its focus on a particular local government area and therefore cannot, by itself, establish what is happening across Nigeria. Ezo et al. (2026), examining Bayelsa and Delta States, also found that the availability of funds is important for implementing grassroots development initiatives. Their work nevertheless points to an important qualification: access to money alone does not guarantee successful development projects because financial planning and expenditure control also matter. These differences are important to the

present study. The literature provides reasonable support for the view that financial resources matter, but it does not establish that financial autonomy automatically produces better service delivery. The quality of financial management, accountability, institutional capacity, and the wider political environment can influence what local governments achieve. This is particularly important after the 2024 Supreme Court judgment, because the legal basis for financial autonomy has changed while the practical conditions surrounding its implementation remain unsettled.

ii. Financial Autonomy, Grassroots Service Delivery and Local Development

The relationship between local government finance and grassroots service delivery has received considerable attention in Nigerian literature. Local governments are expected to provide or support services that directly affect communities, including primary healthcare, basic education, rural roads, water supply, sanitation, and other local infrastructure. Ezo et al. (2026) found that the availability of funds affects the ability of local governments to implement development initiatives. Bappi et al. (2026) reached a related conclusion, although their findings also show the importance of accountability and proper management of expenditure. The literature therefore suggests that the effect of financial autonomy should not be considered in isolation. Fagbemi et al. (2025) maintained that local governments require both financial independence and effective systems for managing public resources. This position is consistent with the concerns raised by Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024), who identified weaknesses in financial control and state interference as continuing problems in local government administration. In other words, giving councils greater control over funds may create an opportunity for improved service delivery, but the outcome still depends on how those resources are managed. There is also a limitation in much of the existing literature. Most studies discuss financial autonomy and development as a general relationship rather than examining whether a particular institutional change has altered that relationship. This distinction matters in the present study because the 2024 Supreme Court judgment introduced a significant change in the legal and financial environment within which local governments operate. Existing evidence can therefore help explain the likely opportunities created by financial autonomy, but it cannot be treated as direct evidence of the effects of the judgment itself.

iii. The 2024 Supreme Court Judgment and the Emerging Post-Judgment Context

The Supreme Court judgment of 11 July 2024 in *Attorney General of the Federation v. Attorney General of Abia State & 35 Others* represents an important development in Nigeria's local government system. The Court directed that funds due to local governments from the Federation

Account should be paid directly to democratically elected local government councils and should not be controlled or withheld by state governments (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2024). Onanuga (2024) described the decision as an important development in the application of constitutional federalism. The judgment changed the legal context of the financial autonomy debate, but it did not remove all the institutional problems surrounding local government administration. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG, 2024) identified financial autonomy as an important issue in determining whether local councils can effectively perform their constitutional functions. Asiegbu (2025) also discussed the continuing constitutional and institutional issues surrounding local government autonomy after the judgment. More importantly, there is still limited systematic evidence showing the actual effects of the judgment on local government service delivery. Recent reporting has raised concerns about continued state control over local government allocations, suggesting that the practical implementation of the judgment has not been uniform. Tunji et al. (2026) reported continuing disputes over local government allocations, even after the Supreme Court decision. Such evidence is useful for understanding implementation, but newspaper reporting cannot substitute for systematic empirical assessment across local governments. This distinction exposes an important gap. Studies published around the period have continued to discuss the expected benefits of financial autonomy, while evidence demonstrating measurable post-judgment changes in service delivery remains limited. The present study therefore does not treat the 2024 judgment as proof that local government performance has already improved. Instead, it examines the available post-judgment evidence and considers what the judgment means for financial independence and grassroots service delivery.

iv. Study Review and Research Gap

The reviewed studies provide useful evidence, but they differ in their geographical coverage, emphasis, and ability to explain the post-judgment situation. Bappi et al. (2026) provide evidence from one local government area in Gombe State, while Ezo et al. (2026) focus on development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. These studies help establish the importance of financial resources, but their findings cannot be directly presented as evidence of nationwide changes following the Supreme Court judgment. Similarly, Fagbemi et al. (2025), Shola and Saka (2026), and Aliyu et al. discuss the importance of financial autonomy for local government performance and development. Their arguments are relevant to the present study, but they largely address the broader autonomy debate rather than providing a systematic assessment of the post-2024 situation. Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024) add an important dimension by drawing attention to financial control and institutional challenges, but their work predates the Supreme Court judgment.

The main gap, therefore, is not that previous researchers have ignored local government financial autonomy. Rather, the gap lies in the limited systematic assessment of what the 2024 judgment means in practice for local government financial control and grassroots service delivery. There is also limited comparative evidence showing whether the legal change has produced similar effects across different states. This is important because the existence of a court judgment does not necessarily mean that its provisions are being implemented uniformly. The present study addresses this gap through a documentary examination of the post-judgment evidence. It brings together the Supreme Court decision, recent academic studies, institutional materials, and evidence on implementation challenges to assess the opportunities created by financial autonomy and the factors that may limit its effect on grassroots service delivery. Its contribution is therefore not to repeat the established argument that local governments need financial autonomy, but to examine that argument within the new legal and institutional context created by the 2024 judgment.

v. Theoretical Framework: Decentralization Theory

Decentralization Theory provides the main theoretical basis for this study. Rondinelli (1981) explains decentralization in terms of transferring authority and responsibilities from higher levels of government to lower levels. Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) further emphasize that decentralization can bring decision-making closer to citizens and improve the ability of public institutions to respond to local needs. The theory is relevant to the present study because financial autonomy involves more than the transfer of funds. It concerns whether local governments have sufficient authority to make decisions about resources and use them in response to local priorities. From this perspective, direct access to statutory allocations should give local councils greater room to plan and implement services without excessive control from state governments. The theory also provides a basis for examining the limits of financial autonomy. Decentralization does not necessarily produce better outcomes simply because authority or resources are transferred. Local institutions require administrative capacity, accountability, financial controls, and effective oversight to use their new responsibilities properly. This supports the concern raised by Bappi et al. (2026) that financial independence needs to be accompanied by proper budgeting and monitoring. For this study, Decentralization Theory therefore guides the analysis in three related ways: first, whether the 2024 judgment has strengthened the financial authority of local governments; second, whether greater control over resources creates opportunities for improved grassroots service delivery; and third, what institutional and political conditions may prevent those opportunities from being realized. These propositions provide a clearer link between the theory and the findings rather than treating decentralization simply as a general explanation of local government autonomy.

Methodology

i. Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative documentary research design. This approach was considered suitable because the study examines the implications of the 2024 Supreme Court judgment through existing academic, legal, institutional, and policy materials rather than through interviews or questionnaires. Creswell and Creswell (2023) explain that qualitative research can be used to examine issues within their context and draw meaning from information obtained from different sources. The analysis focused on four related issues: the financial autonomy of local governments following the judgment, the possible implications of direct access to statutory allocations for grassroots service delivery, the extent to which the judgment has been implemented, and the institutional and political challenges affecting its application. The study examines the available documentary evidence and assesses what the post-judgment developments suggest for local government financial autonomy and grassroots development.

ii. Sources and Search Strategy

Relevant materials were identified mainly through ResearchGate Academia.edu, and Google Scholar where academic papers and related research materials on Nigerian local government administration were located and examined. Searches focused on terms such as local government financial autonomy, local government autonomy in Nigeria, 2024 Supreme Court judgment, local government service delivery, grassroots development, and decentralization. The search was followed by a screening process in which the identified materials were examined for their relevance to the research questions. Attention was given to the Nigerian context, the subject of the study, publication date, clarity of the research methods and findings, and the usefulness of the evidence to the objectives of the paper. Materials that did not contribute directly to the discussion of financial autonomy, decentralization, grassroots development, the Supreme Court judgment, or its implementation were not used in the final analysis.

iii. Documentary Sources and Selection

The final review comprised 19 documentary sources. These included academic journal articles, books, legal documents, institutional and policy publications, and a newspaper report. The selection was purposive because the study required sources that could provide legal, theoretical, empirical, and post-judgment information relevant to the research questions. The Constitution of

the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999, as amended) and the 2024 Supreme Court judgment provided the main legal basis for examining the constitutional position of local government financial autonomy. Academic studies were used to examine existing evidence on financial autonomy, local government performance, service delivery, and grassroots development. Rondinelli (1981) and Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) provided the theoretical foundation, while Creswell and Creswell (2023) informed the research approach. Institutional and policy materials, particularly NESG (2024), provided additional information on the financial and constitutional issues surrounding local government administration. Greater attention was given to materials published between 2024 and 2026 when examining developments following the Supreme Court judgment. Earlier sources were retained where they provided the theoretical or institutional background needed to understand decentralization and local government financial autonomy.

iv. Period Covered

The review covered relevant materials available up to 2026, with particular attention to the period from 2024 to 2026. This period was selected because the Supreme Court delivered the judgment central to the study on 11 July 2024. The analysis distinguished between evidence available before and after the judgment. Pre-judgment studies were used to establish the problems surrounding local government financial autonomy before the Court's decision. Materials published after July 2024 were examined for evidence of implementation, emerging opportunities, and continuing challenges. This distinction was necessary because earlier studies cannot be treated as evidence of the actual effects of the 2024 judgment.

v. Data Analysis

The selected materials were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis involved reading the documents closely, identifying information relevant to the research questions, and grouping related evidence into themes. Rather than treating each source separately, findings from different materials were compared to identify areas of agreement, differences, and limitations. Four main themes guided the analysis: Financial autonomy and direct allocation of funds; Implications for grassroots development and service delivery; Implementation of the 2024 Supreme Court judgment; and Political, institutional, and administrative challenges. The analysis also distinguished between claims about the potential benefits of financial autonomy and evidence of actual post-judgment developments. This distinction was important because several studies discuss the expected benefits of autonomy without measuring changes resulting from the 2024 judgment.

Therefore, such claims were treated as arguments or expectations rather than as proof that the judgment had already improved local government performance.

vi. Theoretical Guidance for the Analysis

The analysis was guided by Decentralization Theory, particularly the argument that transferring authority and resources closer to the people can improve responsiveness to local needs (Rondinelli, 1981; Cheema & Rondinelli, 2007). The theory provided three main questions for the analysis. First, has the judgment strengthened the financial authority of local governments by giving democratically elected councils greater control over their statutory allocations? Second, does greater financial control create practical opportunities for councils to respond to local development needs? Third, what political, institutional, and administrative factors may prevent financial autonomy from producing better outcomes? Using these questions helped move the analysis beyond simply stating that financial autonomy is desirable. It allowed the study to examine the conditions under which financial independence may contribute to grassroots development and the factors that may limit its effects.

vii. Assessment of Source Credibility

The credibility of the sources was considered according to their authority, relevance, publication date, type of evidence, and clarity of the information provided. Primary legal materials, particularly the Constitution and the Supreme Court judgment, were relied upon for legal and constitutional claims. Academic journal articles were given greater weight when discussing research findings, while institutional and policy documents were used to provide policy and administrative perspectives. The newspaper report by Tunji et al. (2026) was used cautiously, mainly to understand reported developments concerning state compliance with the judgment. It was not treated as independent evidence of changes in local government performance. Similarly, arguments about the expected benefits of financial autonomy were distinguished from evidence showing actual post-judgment outcomes.

Findings and Discussion

i. The 2024 Judgment and the Legal Basis for Local Government Financial Autonomy

The clearest outcome identified in this study is the strengthening of the legal basis for local government financial autonomy following the Supreme Court judgment of 11 July 2024. In

Attorney General of the Federation v. Attorney General of Abia State & 35 Others, the Court held that funds due to democratically elected local government councils from the Federation Account should not be withheld or controlled by state governments (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2024). The decision therefore changed the legal position surrounding the control of local government statutory allocations. This is important because the financial autonomy problem existed before the judgment. Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024) identified state interference and weaknesses in financial control as major constraints on local government administration.

The Supreme Court decision directly addressed part of this problem by affirming the right of democratically elected councils to receive their statutory allocations. On this basis, the judgment can be regarded as an institutional step towards greater financial independence rather than simply another statement in the long-running autonomy debate. However, the documentary evidence does not establish that the legal change has already produced corresponding improvements in local government performance. The judgment creates the legal opportunity for councils to exercise greater financial control, but the extent to which that opportunity has been realized depends on implementation. This distinction is central to the study because legal autonomy and practical autonomy are not necessarily the same. From the perspective of Decentralization Theory, Rondinelli (1981) argues that decentralization involves transferring authority and resources to lower levels of government. The judgment is consistent with this principle, but its practical success depends on whether local councils can actually exercise the authority granted to them.

ii. Post-Judgment Financial Autonomy and the Gap Between Law and Practice

A second finding concerns the difference between the legal position established by the Supreme Court and the situation reported after the judgment. The decision provided a stronger basis for direct access to local government funds, but available post-judgment evidence does not show uniform implementation across the country. Tunji et al. (2026) reported continuing disputes over local government allocations in some states, including allegations that state governments were still exercising influence over funds meant for local councils. This evidence is significant because it shows that the judgment did not automatically remove the political and administrative practices that had developed around local government finances. At the same time, the report should be treated as evidence of implementation problems rather than proof that all states have failed to comply.

The finding therefore points to a gap between formal financial autonomy and effective financial control. A court judgment can establish the legal right of local governments, but implementation

requires cooperation from the institutions responsible for releasing, receiving, managing, and monitoring public funds. This supports Cheema and Rondinelli's (2007) position that decentralization requires more than transferring authority. Institutional arrangements and administrative capacity are also necessary for lower levels of government to use their responsibilities effectively. The post-judgment situation consequently presents a mixed picture. There has been a clear legal development, but the available documentary evidence is not sufficient to establish a nationwide improvement in the actual financial independence of local governments. This is an important distinction from earlier discussions that treated financial autonomy mainly as a question of whether local governments should control their own resources.

iii. Financial Autonomy and Grassroots Development: An Enabling Condition, Not a Proven Outcome

The study also examined whether the financial autonomy strengthened by the judgment can be linked to grassroots development. The evidence supports the importance of financial resources for local development, but it does not establish that the 2024 judgment has already produced measurable improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, education, employment, or other grassroots indicators. Bappi et al. (2026), for example, found a relationship between financial autonomy and local government performance in Yamaltu/Deba Local Government Area. Ezo et al. (2026) similarly showed the importance of available funds in implementing development initiatives in Bayelsa and Delta States. These findings are useful because they demonstrate why control over financial resources matters for local development. However, they cannot be treated as direct evidence of the effects of the 2024 Supreme Court judgment because the studies examine different settings and do not provide a systematic before-and-after assessment of the judgment.

The distinction is important for interpreting the present findings. Greater financial control may give local councils more room to respond to community priorities, but it does not guarantee that resources will produce better development outcomes. A council may receive funds directly and still experience poor service delivery where budgeting, procurement, monitoring, or expenditure control is weak. Financial autonomy is therefore better understood as an enabling condition for grassroots development, rather than evidence of development by itself. This finding also gives a more cautious application of Decentralization Theory. Bringing financial decisions closer to communities may improve responsiveness, as Rondinelli (1981) explains, but this benefit depends on the ability of local institutions to use their authority effectively. The 2024 judgment has created

greater space for this form of decentralization, but the available evidence does not yet allow the study to claim that the change has produced widespread improvements in grassroots services.

iv. Accountability and Management of Local Government Funds

Another issue emerging from the analysis is the relationship between financial autonomy and accountability. Direct allocation gives local councils clearer responsibility for funds assigned to them. This could make it easier to identify who is responsible for financial decisions and how allocations are used. However, clearer responsibility does not automatically mean better accountability. The NESG (2024) stressed the importance of financial autonomy in enabling local governments to perform their constitutional functions, while Ogbenjuwa and Akpan (2024) highlighted weaknesses in financial control within local government administration. These concerns suggest that greater control over funds needs to be matched with effective budgeting, auditing, procurement procedures, and public reporting. The implication is that the judgment can strengthen accountability only where local councils are subject to effective financial controls and public oversight. Without such safeguards, direct access to funds could create a different form of financial risk rather than solve the existing problem. The relevant issue is therefore not simply who controls the money, but also how the money is managed and accounted for. This finding adds an important qualification to the argument for financial autonomy. Removing excessive state control may strengthen local government independence, but financial independence must operate alongside transparency and oversight. In this sense, decentralization requires both authority and responsible management.

v. Variation in Implementation and the Limits of Available Post-Judgment Evidence

The documentary evidence also points to differences in implementation. The available post-judgment reports do not present a single experience across all local governments. Tunji et al. (2026), for instance, documented continuing disputes over local government allocations in some states. This indicates that the practical effect of the judgment may depend on the level of compliance, political conditions, administrative arrangements, and the capacity of individual councils. However, the study cannot establish precise differences among all 36 states because the available sources do not provide comparable financial and service-delivery data for each state. This limitation is important and should not be hidden by making broad national claims. What can reasonably be established is that implementation has faced difficulties in some areas and that the available evidence is not yet sufficient to measure the overall effect of the judgment across Nigeria.

This finding responds directly to the post-judgment gap identified in the literature. The question is no longer only whether local governments need financial autonomy. It is also whether the legal change has translated into actual control over resources and, subsequently, measurable improvements in local services. The present documentary evidence provides an early assessment of that process but cannot replace a longitudinal or state-by-state empirical study.

vi. Findings in Relation to Decentralization Theory

The findings provide partial support for the propositions developed from Decentralization Theory. The first proposition was that the 2024 judgment could strengthen local government control over financial resources. The evidence supports this at the legal level, since the Supreme Court clearly affirmed the entitlement of democratically elected councils to their statutory allocations (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2024). The second proposition concerned the possibility of improved grassroots service delivery. Here, the evidence is more limited. Existing studies show that financial resources and local government performance are connected, but the available post-2024 material does not demonstrate that the Supreme Court judgment itself has caused measurable improvements in healthcare, education, infrastructure, employment, or other defined grassroots outcomes. The relationship should therefore be treated as conditional rather than automatic. The third proposition concerned the conditions that may limit decentralization. On this point, the findings provide stronger support. Continued implementation disputes, financial management concerns, and institutional limitations show that transferring or protecting financial authority does not remove the wider conditions that shape local government performance. Cheema and Rondinelli (2007) similarly emphasize the importance of institutional capacity and accountability in decentralization. The Nigerian experience therefore shows that decentralization is not simply a matter of transferring resources from one level of government to another. The effectiveness of the reform depends on whether local governments can exercise their authority, manage funds properly, and operate within a system of effective oversight. The 2024 judgment has strengthened the legal foundation for this process, but the longer-term development effects remain to be established.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This study examined the implications of the 2024 Supreme Court judgment for local government financial autonomy and grassroots development in Nigeria. The documentary evidence shows that the most established outcome of the judgment is the strengthening of the legal basis for local

governments to receive and control their statutory allocations directly. This represents an important step towards greater financial autonomy and is consistent with the decentralization principle of placing authority closer to the people (Supreme Court of Nigeria, 2024). At the same time, the study found a clear gap between legal recognition and practical implementation. Evidence of continuing disputes over local government allocations indicates that the judgment has not yet produced a uniform system of financial autonomy across the country. More importantly, the available evidence does not demonstrate that the judgment has already resulted in measurable improvements in healthcare, education, infrastructure, employment, or other grassroots development outcomes.

The study therefore concludes that financial autonomy should be viewed as an enabling condition rather than a guarantee of grassroots development. Greater control over public resources can give local governments more opportunity to respond to community needs, but the outcome depends on proper financial management, accountability, institutional capacity, and compliance with the Court's decision. The long-term value of the judgment will consequently depend on how effectively its legal position is translated into actual financial control and responsible local governance. A further limitation is that the study relied on documentary evidence and did not examine comparable local government financial or service-delivery data before and after the judgment. It therefore cannot establish a causal effect of the judgment on grassroots development. Future empirical research should address this gap by examining measurable changes in local government finances and specific service-delivery indicators across selected states or local governments.

Recommendations

- i. The Federal Government and relevant state institutions should ensure that the financial arrangements established by the judgment are applied consistently. This is necessary to reduce the gap between the Court's legal position and actual financial practice at the local level.
- ii. Greater control over funds should be accompanied by stronger budgeting, accounting, auditing, procurement, and expenditure controls. This is particularly important because weaknesses in financial control remain a challenge in local government administration.
- iii. Councils should direct available resources towards clearly identified local priorities, including primary healthcare, basic education, rural roads, water, sanitation, and other services within their responsibilities. This would make it easier to determine whether increased financial control is producing practical benefits for communities.

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