The Politicization of Traditional Institutions and National Security in Nigeria

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Abstract: The study examined the politicization of traditional institutions and national security, and it was noted that the Nigerian state is currently facing serious security challenges as the insecurity in Nigeria has graduated from petty crimes such as assault, stealing, etc. to heinous crimes such as bombing, highway robbery, burglary, arson, murder, rape, etc. Structural functionalism theory is adopted in this study to establish the traditional rulership institution as a functional organ within the nucleus of security challenges facing Nigerian society. The study adopted secondary sources of data collection and analysis. It was discovered that the existence of traditional rulers in Nigeria predates the coming of Europeans into Africa, but recently, there has been the politicization of traditional institutions, which has affected national security in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, the study recommends that traditional institutions should not be politicized but rather allowed to play vital roles in the socio-economic development of their communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian State is currently grappling with significant security difficulties as the level of insecurity in Nigeria has escalated from minor offences such as assault and theft to grave crimes including bombings, highway robberies, burglaries, arson, murder, and rape. Violent crime in Nigeria has reached a state of being widespread and firmly established. Over the past two decades, the Nigeria Police have documented a steady increase in incidents of homicide, bombings, and armed robbery. Regardless of the veracity of crime data, the perception of an increasing threat has caused widespread apprehension. Acemoglu (2014). Nigerians are concerned that, despite the increased commitment of funds to security in recent years, they have not yet witnessed a consistent state of peace and security that may foster social, political stability, economic progress, and attract foreign investment to the country

(Giana, 2021). One of the most significant, if not the most severe, challenges to Nigeria's corporate existence, apart from the Civil War, is the alarming and widespread increase in insecurity. According to Smith (2023), the security issues in Nigeria after the country's return to civil rule in 1999 have significantly jeopardized effective government (Nwagbaso, 2012). Various militia factions, such as The Egbesu Boys in the Niger Delta, the Odua People's Congress in Western Nigeria, and The Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria, have exerted control over the country at different times. During each of these distinct periods, the group maintained absolute dominance as the security authorities proved incapable of restraining them. According to Thompson & Davis (2019), the effectiveness of gathering intelligence and taking proactive measures to combat insecurity is becoming more important than relying solely on numerical strength. The current difficult situation in Nigeria regarding security requires a new approach, such as utilizing the abilities of Traditional Rulers to address the increasing insecurity in the country (Nwagbaso, 2012).

Traditional institutions were established to organise the public affairs of the people. In Igbo culture, the traditional institutions consist of the Umuadas, which are female kinship groups, the Age grades, which are social groups based on age, traditional rulers, and the Town Union, which is a community organisation. The Umuada's During the pre-colonial era, the Igbo people regarded women as sacrosanct and allowed them to actively engage in making collective decisions for specific sensitive matters that directly affected their interests. They achieve this through a collective organisation called Otu Umuada, whose members are influential, authoritative, and highly regarded within their communities. They are sometimes seen as protectors of village traditions, and frequently intervene when the village's rules are broken, imposing penalties on those who violate them. The Age Grades: The age grades play a crucial role in the social structure, particularly in our traditional Nigerian societies. (Yemisi, 2018).

Theoretical Framework
Structural Functionalism Theory by Émile Durkheim (1893)
Functionalism perceives society as a system composed of interconnected parts that collectively create a unified whole. According to this perspective, the various components of society are comprehended in relation to their contribution to the overall social structure. Social institutions are examined as integral elements of the social system rather than as isolated entities. Functionalism posits that all cultures possess a common set of norms and values. The law serves as a means of embodying and enforcing societal norms and values. The social order is established through the internalization of these norms and values, which is facilitated by the traditional rulers' duties within their communities. This study adopts the theory of structural functionalism to examine the traditional rulership institution and its role as a functional organ within Nigerian society. The significant contributions of notable sociologists like August Comte, Herbert Spencer (with his focus on organic structure), and Emile Durkheim offer valuable insights into the functioning of society. Structural functionalism perceives society as a network of interconnected elements that are purposefully organized to create a cohesive whole. The diverse organizations in society are integrated to support one another in order to establish a comprehensive system that collaboratively works towards a shared objective. Yemisi (2018) contends that functionalism guarantees the

presence of common norms and values across all societies. These norms and values are reflected in the legal system, and the social order is maintained through the internalization of these norms and values by traditional rulers in their respective communities.

2. RELATED WORKS

Balogun (2019) in traditional institutions in governance and development in Nigeria provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution and functions of traditional institutions in Nigeria and explores how these institutions have traditionally served as mediators in conflicts and facilitators of development but contends that their politicization has undermined their efficacy, contributing to governance challenges and security risks. Okpeh (2020) in ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria: causal analysis and proposed solutions examines the role of traditional institutions in managing ethno-religious tensions and indicates how political manipulation of these institutions exacerbates communal conflicts, fueling insecurity and undermining national cohesion. Akindele (2018), Traditional rulers and governance in Nigeria: A Study of Oyo State," offers a localized perspective on the politicization of traditional institutions and highlights how state interference in traditional governance systems compromises their autonomy and effectiveness, impacting security dynamics at the grassroots level. Salau (2017), in Traditional Institutions and Security Challenges in Northern Nigeria, examines the role of traditional leaders in addressing security threats, particularly in the northern region, and reveals how the co-option of traditional rulers by political elites undermines community trust and hampers efforts to combat insurgency and banditry. Adeyemi (2021) in the Politics of Chieftaincy and Security in Southwestern Nigeria" investigates the interplay between chieftaincy politics and security dynamics in the southwestern region and underscores the importance of preserving the integrity of traditional institutions to mitigate security risks stemming from internal power struggles. Okafor (2019) in Traditional Authority and Security in Nigeria: Insights from the Niger Delta explores the role of traditional leaders in addressing security challenges in the volatile Niger Delta region and highlights how the politicization of traditional institutions exacerbates resource conflicts and militancy, hindering peacebuilding efforts. Ogbonnaya (2020) examines the influence of traditional institutions on electoral violence in Nigeria, examines the nexus between traditional rulers and electoral violence, and elucidates how the instrumentalization of traditional institutions for partisan interests fuels election-related violence, posing significant threats to national security. Afolayan (2018) investigates traditional institutions and farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria, investigates the role of traditional authorities in mitigating farmer-herder conflicts, and reveals how politicization compromises the neutrality of traditional leaders, exacerbating tensions and impeding conflict resolution efforts. Adewumi (2019) in gender, traditional leadership, and security in Nigeria" explores the gendered dimensions of traditional leadership and its implications for security and indicates that the exclusion of women from traditional governance structures perpetuates inequalities and undermines efforts to address security challenges effectively while Ameh (2021) in youth unemployment and radicalization: the role of traditional institutions in countering extremism analyzes the involvement of traditional authorities in countering youth radicalization and extremism and

emphasizes the importance of empowering traditional leaders to engage youth positively and prevent their susceptibility to radical ideologies, thereby enhancing national security.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study on the politicization of traditional institutions and its effects on national security in Nigeria utilizes a comprehensive descriptive survey methodology rooted in content analysis. This approach systematically examines and interprets secondary data to uncover the intricate relationship between traditional institutions and national security. The descriptive survey methodology serves as the backbone of this research, aiming to systematically document and interpret the facts surrounding the politicization of traditional institutions in Nigeria. The primary focus of this approach is to describe the current state, historical background, and consequential impacts of politicizing traditional institutions on national security. The study begins by identifying the traditional institutions in Nigeria, their historical foundations, and their roles in society. These institutions, often rooted in cultural and ethnic heritage, play crucial roles in community governance, conflict resolution, and the preservation of cultural values, documented the ways in which these traditional institutions have been politicized. This includes examining how political actors and interests have infiltrated and influenced these institutions, altering their traditional roles and functions. The study explores various dimensions of politicization, such as the appointment of traditional leaders by political figures, the involvement of traditional institutions in political campaigns, and the use of these institutions for political gain. Analyzed how the altered roles and functions of these institutions impact community stability, conflict dynamics, and overall national security. The study examines specific incidents and trends to illustrate the connection between politicization and security outcomes. It also considers other relevant factors that may influence the relationship between traditional institutions and national security. These factors include socio-economic conditions, regional differences, ethnic tensions, and historical legacies. The study relies heavily on secondary sources of information to gather data. These sources provide valuable insights into the history, dynamics, and effects of traditional institution politicization in Nigeria. The secondary sources used in the study include archival records and historical documents, articles, books, official government publications and reports, reports from non-governmental organizations, and media reports. Content analysis forms the core of the study's analytical framework.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Politicization of Traditional Institutions and National Security
Smith and Brown (2020) observed that "traditional rulers are the primary individuals entrusted with the authority to control the affairs of the people, and they are accountable to a ruler with a vested title. Town unions: In Igbo land, the intensity peaked after the civil war as numerous public facilities, including markets, town halls, maternity homes, dispensaries, and schools, were extensively damaged. This was due to the community's reputation for independently funding and providing amenities. Starting in 1970, the people began the process of rebuilding their schools, health facilities, and markets. The establishment of town

unions is crucial for rural development as it addresses the government's neglect of the people. Town unions serve the purpose of disseminating information about government policies, shaping public opinion, raising funds, expanding and improving public services, promoting and supporting collective farming activities, and contributing to the maintenance of law and order. These symbols represent the efficacy of traditional instructions in societal development.

Duma (2020) asserts that traditional rulers in Nigeria had been present prior to the arrival of Europeans in Africa. Before colonial authority, the governance of communities in Nigeria was predominantly entrusted to traditional rulers. Patel & Jones (2018) noted that traditional rulers emerged organically as a result of a community's aspiration to unite under the guidance of a trustworthy individual. This leader would be responsible for safeguarding the community against adversaries, preserving their cultural practices, and promoting the advancement of the community as a whole. Traditional kings possessed a wide range of rights and authorities within their own communities. Garcia (2019) defines traditional rulers as a political institution that follows indigenous political structures. These rulers are appointed based on their established track records and in accordance with the rules and practices of their community. Ngugen and Chen (2020) have described traditional rulers as including several entities found in rural cultures, such as traditional rulers themselves, kin groups, farmers' forums, age groups, women's clubs, and sacred institutions like churches, temples, and mosques.

Traditional rulers serve as the guardians of their community's customs, traditions, and rituals. Furthermore, these organizations are entrusted with the duties of making laws, carrying out laws, and administering justice. Their role involves legislating, enforcing, interpreting, and implementing the essential laws, customs, and traditions of the population to ensure unity, integration, and efficient governance in their societies. The primary purpose of institutions is to safeguard the habits and traditions of a community and to handle conflicts that may arise among its members through the use of laws and customs. Johnson & Brown (2022) stated that before the arrival of Europeans, the Ibos were a diverse community comprising more than two hundred autonomous territorial units that were separated into villages. The internal structure of these organizations was based on patrilineal clans and lineages. Although these communities were autonomous, they maintained strong social bonds. The traditional institutions of the Igbo people encompassed various entities, such as the family unit, the Amala (a council of elders), the Okpara system (which recognized the authority of the eldest male), the Umuanna (representing the clan), the Umuada (referring to females born in a family but married out), age grades, the assembly of the people, the Ohanaeze (which combined the assembly of the people and the king), the hunters association, agbara (local deities or oracles), as well as women groups and associations. Nevertheless, the Eze/Obi in Council, town unions, age grades, women organizations, and youth associations are widespread and important institutions in communities in Imo State. They have well-defined roles, particularly in the areas of dispensing justice and resolving conflicts.

Borgman (2010) contends that the majority of communities in Imo State possess a quasi-traditional political structure. In contrast to the northern region, the Igbos lacked centralized governmental institutions or traditional authority. The leadership was mostly republican and characterized by a greater emphasis on democratic principles. Some semblance of a central

authority was observed in certain locations, such as Onitsha and Asaba, exemplified by the presence of the Obi of Onitsha (Nwaolise, 2019). Nevertheless, even in the absence of centralized organized organizations, political stability was upheld by the interconnected system of ancient institutions. The family, serving as the fundamental unit of governance and socialization, followed a patrilineal lineage. The father, as the patriarch, resolved minor conflicts within the family and conducted traditional rituals and offerings. The council of elders, known as Amala, consisted of the heads of various families and was in charge of the day-to-day governance of the village. It was the father's responsibility to inform his household of the Amala's decisions after each meeting (Borgman, 2010).

The village assembly, known as Umunna, was a significant institution in local governance, comprising all adult males within the community. The village assembly has the authority to deliberate on any matter that impacts the community. Additionally, it has the power to call upon the council of elders if any instances of mismanagement are noticed. Put simply, the village assembly served as a means to prevent the council of elders from going too far in their actions, regardless of whether they were situated in rural or urban regions. Traditional rulers have a crucial responsibility for maintaining the security of their territories. Traditional rulers were granted the authority to exercise legislative, executive, and judicial powers, with the expectation that they would fulfill their duties faithfully and without exhibiting authoritarian behaviour that could exacerbate conflicts. Conflict is an inherent aspect of human existence, just like the idea of peace, despite being different from the commonly held global or universal understanding. Africans possess distinct methods of conceptualizing war. The term 'conflict' is associated with unfavourable implications. One's upbringing, qualities, views, and surroundings, among other factors, impact the extent to which they respond to disputes.

Johnson and Brown (2022) said that the common associations people have with conflicts are war, combat, miscommunication, disputes, disorder, tension, turmoil, hostility, and similar occurrences between individuals, organizations, communities, nations, or states. Wang and Lee (2021) noted that those who have unfavourable perceptions about conflicts often deal with them in a harmful manner, resulting in poor consequences. Conflict is defined as the dynamic exchange that leads to a lack of compatibility, disagreement, or disharmony amongst social entities (Acemough, 2014). It can also be described as the actions between individuals or groups that are contradictory in their pursuit of satisfying their desires, requirements, or responsibilities. Conflict typically arises when incompatible activities occur and often leads to a "win-lose" outcome. The settlement, transformation, and management of conflict can also result in a mutually beneficial outcome.

Smith (2023) defined conflict as a state of struggle between two opposing forces that arises from a variety of differing perspectives, desires, requirements, and interests. According to Kim & Singh (2023), conflict is commonly defined as a competition for limited status, power, and resources in which opponents try to neutralize, harm, or eliminate their rivals. Conflict can arise whenever incompatible activities occur, leading to a win-lose situation. The settlement, transformation, and management of conflict can also result in a mutually beneficial outcome. According to Wang and Lee (2021), conflict resolution allows for engagement with the involved parties, aiming to minimize the extent, intensity, and consequences of disputes (Acemough, 2014).

The skill of resolving conflict arises from the understanding that conflict, though unavoidable, should not be ignored. It is necessary to manage conflict by engaging with relevant parties to establish shared principles and practices that promote peaceful relationships instead of violence. During crises, traditional rulers clearly played crucial roles in informally coordinating and organizing peace negotiations as situations escalated. In the context of this thesis, conflict management refers to the process of mitigating the negative consequences of conflict while enhancing its beneficial outcomes. According to Johnson and Brown (2022), the management of conflict refers to the techniques and procedures used to promote a peaceful resolution to conflicts. It can also be defined as actions taken to address the fundamental differences causing a conflict, which may involve efforts to encourage the parties to acknowledge and accept each other's presence (Wang & Lee, 2021).

Traditional Institutions and Conflicts in Nigeria

Conflicts are often addressed and resolved in accordance with the customary practices and traditions of the individuals involved. As a result, many communities had to adopt different strategies for managing and resolving conflicts. What is appropriate in one community may not be suitable in another. According to Ededgoh (2013), "there is significant variation in the traditional methods of crisis management across different societies and communities. Conflict management involves the process of resolving conflicts or differences between parties involved in a conflict. Traditional leaders have historically played a significant role in mediation, ensuring a fair and equitable procedure for resolving tribal disputes. In certain instances, they have also taken the lead in efforts to restore peace and promote reconciliation. In the past, disagreements were resolved by traditional elders. However, in contemporary times, traditional leaders have gained importance in the process of mediating disputes, particularly in Africa (Nwolise, 2016).

The emergence of conflict management is a direct consequence of the growing interdependence between different parties and the intricate nature of the underlying issues that give rise to conflicts. This, in turn, diminishes the significance of traditional leaders' role in managing conflicts. Traditional monarchs are seen as the mediators of peace and guardians of the law throughout the community. They garner greater respect from the public due to their significant impact, compelling personalities, and steadfast convictions. Leaders or representatives who are closer to the people they lead or represent tend to receive obedience and respect from individuals, sometimes through mediation (Ededgoh, 2013). Currently, especially in certain communities in the South East, the authority of traditional institutions has been largely supplanted by government agencies and individuals appointed to various positions in community governance (Acemoghi, 2014). The emerging class occasionally perceives the established institutions as a challenge to their control over power and, thus, consistently restricts the authority of the traditional institutions. Nevertheless, the current disregard for traditional institutions and their limited and inconsequential involvement in contemporary governance, in contrast to their historical role in managing and resolving conflicts, is a significant factor contributing to the escalating incidence of community conflicts in numerous communities, towns, and cities.

Even in circumstances where they were acknowledged and given the authority to handle problems within their territories, the outcomes have generally been quite poor. Examples are

derived from the results of government policy about alternative dispute resolution, which refers to resolving legal conflicts outside of the judicial system. Occasionally, cases are sent back to the law court as a result of inadequate management at the community level. The disregard and marginalization of traditional institutions, along with numerous land disputes, high rates of divorce and rape, communal conflicts, and ongoing power struggles within Ezeship and presidents' general offices, all contribute to the scrutiny of community administration.

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has had numerous political crises that have heightened insecurity, resulted in the loss of lives and destruction of property, and disrupted the socio-economic fabric of the nation. Nevertheless, the crisis has evolved into a more complex and dangerous state, characterized by increased sophistication, lethality, and militarization, as well as a broader network of international terrorists. The government has made significant attempts to combat the widespread insecurity but has achieved limited progress. Instead of prioritizing the needs of the people, such as providing schools, quality education, and clean water, the traditional institutions in Nigeria often depart from this responsibility and focus on their own agenda, which does not contribute to the country's growth. The traditional rulers, as the leaders of their respective ethnic groups, clans, or communities, play a crucial role in managing, resolving, and preventing conflicts, making their significance undeniable. They oversee individuals within their jurisdiction and mediate societal disputes to maintain a constant state of peace and stability. Their words have the weight of laws for the people, and their advice and opinions on matters are both respected and embraced (Acemoghi, 2014).

The significance of traditional institutions in security management cannot be overstated. The most recent iteration of Nigeria's National Security Strategy 2019, a publication issued by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), emphasized the vital importance of their roles in maintaining national unity and stability by safeguarding our cultural, traditional, and moral foundations. They act as the initial defenders in managing communal disagreements and crises, therefore promoting peaceful coexistence among our diverse population. Traditional institutions predate the arrival of British colonial rulers. Over time, various changes have occurred in the governance and management of traditional communities, leading to the classification of the old system as traditional. The subsequent system introduced by the British is referred to as a modern institution. The rise of contemporary institutions in governance and progress resulted in the decreased significance of old institutions. Some experts are questioning the ongoing existence of these entities as well as the role they are currently fulfilling. Despite the aforementioned, traditional institutions have proven to be the most long-lasting pre-colonial institutions in Nigeria, persevering despite several types of administrative reforms (Acemough, 2014).

Throughout history, traditional African societies have consistently been recognized as hubs of political civilization due to the African people's acknowledgment, acceptance, and faith in the traditional rulers' ability to serve as effective agents and advocates for governance and politics based on moral principles in Africa (Patel & Jones, 2018). The political activities observed in pre-colonial Nigerian societies and other African regions, where traditional institutions governed the people, were closely linked to the significant contributions made by traditional rulers (Patel & Jones, 2018). Nevertheless, with the establishment of the republican state, it is necessary to reassess how the prominent institutions might be more

effectively involved in advancing the political system, particularly in the local areas that they directly govern (Buhari, 2020).

5. CONCLUSION

The significance of traditional institutions is of utmost importance and should not be subjected to political manipulation. Traditional institutions play a crucial role in generating revenue and assessing community taxes. They also have the authority to make decisions on religious matters and resolve conflicts that arise as a result. Additionally, they contribute to the development of their communities by undertaking projects such as constructing health centres, town halls, market shops, post offices, and improving the infrastructure like roads, bridges, and culverts. The functionalist perspective has faced significant criticism, with critics arguing that this style of explanation posits that the pieces of a system exist solely due to the positive outcomes they provide to the system as a whole. The primary issue with this style of reasoning is that it confuses an effect with a cause. Thus, the claim that traditional rulers engage in development projects within their jurisdiction is a testament to the shared importance and structure of their authority, but it is misplaced. Despite the extensive criticism of functionalism, it should not be dismissed without consideration. Functionalism assumes that society should be viewed as a cohesive entity with interrelated parts and the presence of social institutions that shape human behaviour.

Nevertheless, these methods of community development are seen as pertinent when assessing the influence of customary regulations and traditional establishments in addressing the issue of insecurity in Imo State. Put simply, traditional rulers are depicted as a component of a specific system that has specific roles to fulfill in the process of transformation and growth within the local government setting and broader community. Conclusively, for the purpose of this research, the functionalist perspective has been favoured due to its ability to provide a deeper knowledge of the role played by traditional rulers, not only in maintaining peace and order but also in completing their primary functions. The resolution of land disputes as well as the implementation of projects aimed at developing and transforming their communities to resemble developed Western civilizations. It is advisable that traditional institutions should not be politicized, but rather they should be permitted to fulfill their crucial responsibilities in the socio-economic advancement of their communities.

Moreover, it is crucial to pinpoint the elements that impede the efficient operation of conventional institutions. In many conventional environments, such as Imo State under the leadership of Rochas Okorocha, it has been found that traditional rulers were mistreated and marginalized, being given less importance.

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