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RELEVANCE OF TRADITIONAL RULERS IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA AS GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

For centuries, before the advent of British rule, governance in different parts of present-day Nigeria was synonymous with traditional institutions and their rulers. Local administration generally centered on the traditional ruler who was considered the repository of religious, legislative, executive and judicial functions.. This study investigates the relevance of traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria as governance using traditional institutions in Lagos State, Nigeria as a case study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design, while multi stage sampling technique was used to select only three Local Government Areas (LGAs) out of 57 LGA in Lagos State and simple random sampling method was applied at selecting the sample of 100 LGA employees from each of the LGAs making a total of 300 respondents from the three 3 LGAs. The instrument used for the study was a self-structured research questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to the participants and was collected immediately after administering them. The data collected from the respondents was analysed using Chi-square statistical tools and inferential statistics was used to analyse the personal data of the respondents. The study found that there is significant relevance of traditional institutions among the people of Lagos State; there is significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State and finally, there is significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study. The study concludes that the traditional rulers play active roles in the emergence of political leaders as well as the success of successive governments in contemporary Nigeria at all levels local, state and federal. The study recommends that there is a need for the Federal Government to give legitimacy that traditional institutions deserve. The researcher recommended that there is need for public re-orientation on the importance of traditional institutions and how they can constitute crucial resources that have the potential to promote grassroots governance and to facilitate access of rural communities to public services.

Keywords: Traditional institution, traditional ruler, contemporary Nigeria, governance, Local Government Area.

Background to the Study

One of the fundamental tenets of Nigerian governance and administration is traditional rulership which predates the colonial period in the country. Traditional institutions, which are arguably the oldest in Nigeria, are deeply ingrained in the history, culture, and customs of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. An ethnic group of people will appoint a

traditional ruler to rule, govern, and administer justice in accordance with the established customs and traditions of the people. A traditional ruler is the keeper of the traditions, history, and customs of that ethnic group of people.

A traditional ruler has been defined as a person who by virtue of his ancestral position occupies the throne or stool of an area and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area and whose throne has been independent traditional ruler stands as the repository of all the executive, legislative and judicial powers of his domain (Osemwota, 2013). In some areas, particularly amongst the Yorubas, a traditional ruler is regarded as a replica of God (mutatis mutandi), by virtue of which all their words become law, the infraction of which oftentimes attract corporeal and sometimes, capital punishments(Ojo, 1976; Edesie,2015 & Sokoh, 2018).

The courts have, over the years, equally recognised the status of traditional rulers. In Adanji v. Hunwo (1908) 1 NLR 74, the Court pronounced as follows: "I say without hesitation that it is a position of honour, of primacy among a particular section of the native community." More often than not, traditional rulership is guided by the principle of legitimacy, stemming from the customs and tradition of the people: from the appointment of the traditional ruler by the recognised and acceptable appointing authority to his charismatic influence which is derived from a wide acceptance of his personality and leadership qualities (Kolawole, 2009).

Role of traditional rulers before Nigeria was created in 1884 (Ojo, 1976). A pin-point determination of the exact origin of traditional institutions in Nigeria remains an elusive quest. However, there is some certainty that most of the nation-states scattered along the then territory now named Nigeria had traditional institutions that played significant roles to their growth, influence, development and dominance, and all-together culminating into the culture-rich, diverse entity now known as Nigeria (Babalola, 2020).

The pre-colonial era featured a well-structured system of traditional rulership that was basically centralised. At that period, access to rulership stool was hereditary while in some parts, traditional structures of rulership were more dispersed, or were acephalous. By and large, traditional rulers occupied important positions among the peoples of pre-colonial Nigeria.

As noted earlier, their positions were legitimized by the traditions, history and culture of their respective peoples who held them in high esteem and reverence (Achebe, 2017). In similar perspective, traditional rulers cater for the economic, social and political aspirations of their people, and today they have become part of individual cultural heritage.

They occupy communal political leadership positions sanctified by cultural, moral and values and enjoy the legitimacy of a particular community to direct their affairs. Traditional institutions constitute a body of polity and administration that are respected by the people of such a community through their respect for culture heritage and the historical antecedent of the land.

The political institutions of the pre-colonial societies included the paramount chiefs, the council of elders, age grade and religious organisation. The Igbos at the pre-colonial period

did not have a single political authority: even though they were a contingent (Cookey, 2010). Since the Igbos shunned the idea of having a single leader at that time, they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organisation in such a way that a man could only lead members of his lineage. There were, thus, many influential and powerful men, with their influence limited to hamlet, clan and village; at that time they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organisation.

In every village, hamlet or clan, there was always a village head who emerged by virtue of age and who in collaboration with other elders settled disputes in that particular village. If the disputes involved another village, the elders, led by the oldest from both villages, came together and resolved the disputes, especially those bordering on elopement and land common at that time. Beyond the socio-economic-cum- the political weight of the traditional rulers, they equally played a major role in matters of conflict resolution, dispute management, and security. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the societies had a series of mechanisms of controlling and managing conflicts, varying from one community to another (Sokoh, 2018).

The traditional rulers in each pre-colonial society obtained their mandate from the society's customs and native laws. As a result, they based their security maintenance, crime prevention and general law enforcement on each society's historical circumstances and desires; and in response, most members of each society willfully partake in programmes and activities to prevent and control crimes, deviants and conflicts. Members of the society, collectively and individually, play roles in the society's law enforcement efforts. They also generally accept society's methods and procedures for security maintenance and conflict management.

One of the main reasons for the wide acceptance of the traditional methods and procedures is that people tend to know their traditional rulers very well. They have a reasonable knowledge of each traditional title-holder's morals, values, and ethics. Traditional rulers under the British Colonial Masters 1884 – 1954: The advent of colonial rule in Nigeria occasioned a major paradigm shift in traditional rulership as it was then known. Colonialism restructured the erstwhile well-organised traditional ruling system and incorporated an indigenous system to serve the interest of the colonial state and the metropolitan authority (Edesie, 2015).

In the colonial era, the British system of colonial administration employed the system of indirect rule, generally in Northern and Western Nigeria. Indirect rule was a British system of ruling her colonies with the use of local chiefs or other approved intermediaries and traditional laws and customs with British officials merely supervising the administration (Emodi & Osiki, 2017). It has also been defined to mean the taking over of existing power structures, harmonizing them and eliminating flagrant abuses of human rights, otherwise leaving many elements intact. It utilised the existing traditional system of administration and recognized the status of traditional rulers who served as the priests of indirect rule.

Colonialism ushered in a transformation in the role of traditional rulers. This change was necessitated by the desire to realize the objective of colonialism, which was to exploit the natural resources of Nigeria to meet the industrial needs of the capitalist metropolis. Traditional rulers were used to serve these objectives.

The underlying logic of ruling through these traditional rulers was primarily cost and as well as the logistical difficulties of directly governing and administering such a vast area with so few officials. After the conquest of Bida and Ilorin, George Goldie declared: "If the welfare of the Native races is to be considered, if dangerous revolts are to be obviated, the general policy of ruling on African principles through Native rulers must be followed for the present' (Babalola, 2020).

The most important role for traditional rulers in the early colonial days was in the area of local administration within the sphere of the new administrative structure established by the colonials – the indirect rule with the governor-general at the head of the administration. The chain of command continued through the lieutenant governors in the Provinces, the district officers in the Divisions, and the Native Authorities in the Native Administration.

Despite the many setbacks, the respect for the traditional institution in Nigeria since Independence has grown steadily, particularly among the political elite. Indeed, there was a recent media account by the veteran journalist, Peter Enahoro, about his brother, Honourable Anthony Enahoro, acquiring the traditional title of Adolor of Uromi to avoid being ridiculed in the Western House of Assembly as a mere "Mister" among members, who were mostly "traditional chiefs."

The irony was also captured in 1982 by the veteran television journalist, Frank Olizeh, when he reported that, though the pre-Independence House of Chiefs had been eliminated in the post-Republican era, there was an uncanny paradox happening in which elected members of the House of Representatives were acquiring chieftaincy titles at a pace that their chamber was becoming the House of Chiefs. Indeed, the acquisition of chieftaincy titles is still seen as conferring legitimacy on recipients for their roles in modern Nigeria (Osemwota, 2013 & Babalola, 2020).

The then, Governor of Oyo State, Chief Abiola Ajimobi, personally endorsed a newspaper advertorial to thank all and sundry who joined in the celebration of the coronation of the new Olubadan of Ibadan. (Oluwalana, 2016). Similarly, Governor Adams Oshiomhole of Edo State was actively involved in the coronation rites of Oba Ewuare II of Benin in 2016 (Nwanne, 2016). The same happened when Ooni of Ife was about to be coronated (Oluwole, 2015). These are interesting examples of the political elites leading in the "re-traditionalisation" of the Nigerian polity.

Another significant dimension in this era is the intimidating rise in, and diversity of, the professional knowledge and executive experience of the traditional rulers in the country. The Emir of Kano, Alhaji Sanusi II is the immediate past governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria and prior to that, Managing Director of First Bank of Nigeria. Ayatse has been Vice Chancellor of two federal universities. The Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria of which I am the chancellor, currently has at least 57 alumni who are traditional rulers, including the present Emirs of Kano, Zaria and Katsina, Shehu of Borno, Gbong Gwom Jos, and the new traditional ruler of Ogidi, Igwe Alexander Uzo Onyido. Recently, a key member of the Central Council of Ibadan Indigenes (CCII), Chief Adeniyi Akintola (SAN), was quoted in the newspapers as saying that: "If you look at the current members of the Olubadan-in-Council, you will discover

that they can make any faculty of a university. They are accomplished bankers, engineers, businessmen and academics. That is the trend now" (Babalola, 2020).

The corollary to this development is that the stools are now more keenly contested, even as more effective laws also exist to smoothen the succession process. Recent successes in Kano and Ife were keenly competitive, but quickly resolved. The kingdoms of Warri/Itsekiri, Ibadan, Benin, etc followed established practices without hitches.

The bane of the traditional institution in the previous periods had been their actual or suspected involvement in partisan politics. In contemporary Nigeria, the institution has no business in partisan politics. Instead, the traditional rulers are uniting in the wars against the common enemies of disease, poverty, ignorance, corruption, crime, drug addiction, armed insurgency, impunity in public office, youth delinquency, etc. Many, such as the Sultan of Sokoto, Oba of Lagos, Emir of Kano, Alake of Egbaland, etc have become the voices of the voiceless, speaking out boldly on matters of general concern, locally, nationally and even internationally. We have become development catalysts and agents for mobilisation for policy implementation, monitoring, and review of policy options. My current focus in Onitsha is on peacebuilding and reconciliation, youth empowerment, infrastructural development, crime eradication, and the preservation of our sense of community in the face of the inevitable forces of urbanisation. Oba Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, Ooni of Ife, has become the instant role model for youth enterprise and hard work.

There have been significant changes in the fortunes of the Nigerian traditional institution from the colonial times to the present. From the findings, the colonial and military regimes are the low points, whilst there have been clashes between the traditional and political elite, the traditional institution has generally fared much better under democratic dispensations, increasingly supported by the rule of law. This paper therefore investigates the relevance of traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria as governance.

Statement of the Problem

For centuries before the advent of British rule, governance in different parts of present-day Nigeria was synonymous with traditional institutions and their rulers. Local administration generally centered on the traditional ruler who was considered the repository of religious, legislative, executive and judicial functions, with a few exceptions (e.g.: in the south-east amongst Ibo communities) (Emordi & Osiki, 2017). In effect, the traditional ruler formed the nucleus of governance. A traditional ruler is defined differently by many authors depending on time and circumstances. In the pre-colonial era a traditional ruler is defined as a person who by virtue of his ancestral position occupies the throne or stool of an area and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area and whose throne has been in existence before the advent of the British in Nigeria (Cookey, 2010). By the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN,1999), a traditional ruler is the traditional head of an ethnic unit or clan who for the time being is the holder of the highest traditional authority whose title is recognized as a traditional ruler's title by the government of the state. From the point of view of the definition of a traditional ruler, as defined by the government, the functions of the traditional rulers have diminished from having legislative, judicial and executive powers in their day to day affairs to a mere advisory status and as custodians of culture and tradition at the local government and to some extent at state levels.

The people however still have high regard and respect for the traditional rulers. The hangover of authority they earned previously still lingers on to the extent that their views and instructions are being obeyed and respected with total loyalty without questions. It is against this background that this study examines the relevance of traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria as governance using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at investigating the relevance of traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria as governance using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

a. investigate the relevance of traditional institution among the people of Lagos State.
b. examine the importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State.
c. Investigate the relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study

Research Hypotheses

Based on the objectives of the present study, the following hypotheses were generated and tested to give direction and guide to the study:

i. There is no significant relevance of traditional institutions among the people of Lagos State.
ii. There is no significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State.
iii. There is no significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. It involves the collection of data for the purpose of assessing the relevance of traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria as governance using Lagos State as a case study. The population for the study comprised of all the Local Government Areas (LGA) employees in Lagos. This population was considered appropriate for this study, because it is believed that Local Government Areas' employees are closer to the traditional institution and rulers. The sample for the study comprised 100 participants randomly selected from each of the three Local Government Areas which were selected using multi-stage sampling technique making the total of 300 respondents for the study. The instrument used for the study was a self-structured research questionnaire. For the respondents to freely express their opinion, the instrument used a four-likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). The questionnaire was a close ended questionnaire, which was divided into two sections A and B. Section "A" comprised the respondents' demographic factors such as sex, age, school etc. Section "B", deals with fifteen questions related to the stated hypotheses. Face and content validity was used to validate the instrument, while Cronbach Alpha method was used to test the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable with co-efficient of 0.893. The collected data were analysed using Chi-square and simple percentage. The simple percentage was used for the analysis of respondents' demographic factors, while Chi-square is used for testing the stated hypotheses.

Analysis of Respondents' Bio-Data

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Number of Response	Percentage (%)
Male	135	45
Female	165	55
Total	300	100

The table above shows 45% of the respondents are male while 55% of them are female. From the table we can submit that female respondents were more than male respondents.

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age	Number of Response	Percentage (%)
25-35	162	54
36-50	105	35
51 and above	33	11
Total	300	100

From the above data obtained in Table 2, 162 respondents representing 54% of the respondents fell within the age range of 25-35 years. 105 respondents representing 35% fell within the age range of 36-50 years, while the remaining 33 respondents representing 11% of the respondents fell within the age range of 51 years and above.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relevance of traditional institutions among the people of Lagos State.

Table 3: Summary of Chi – Square Table

A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL	L.S	DF	X^2cal	X^2tab	Remarks
189	72	30	9	300	0.05	12	84.725	21.026	Rejected
144	123	18	15	300					
114	132	30	24	300					
123	111	54	12	300					
93	42	126	39	300					
663	480	258	99	1500					

Decision rule

At 12 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level, Chi – square critical value is 21.026. Since the calculated Chi – square calculated of 84.725 is greater than Chi- square critical value of 21.026 (X^2cal > X^2tab), the null hypothesis states that "there is no significant relevance of traditional

institutions among the people of Lagos State" was rejected. This means that the alternate hypothesis which states that "there is significant relevance of traditional institutions among the people of Lagos State" was accepted.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State.

Table 4: Summary of Chi – Square Table

A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL	L.S	DF	X^2cal	X^2tab	Remarks
93	57	75	75	300	0.05	12	67.281	21.026	Rejected
63	54	120	63	300					
114	96	57	33	300					
84	126	48	42	300					
129	78	72	21	300					
483	411	372	234	1500					

Decision Rule

At 12 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level, Chi – square critical value was 21.026, while the Calculated Chi – square was 67.281. This shows that the Calculated Chi-square value is greater than Chi- square critical value, therefore the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State" was rejected. The alternate hypothesis which states that "there is significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State" was accepted.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance at the State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study.

Table 5: Summary of Chi – Square Table

A	SA	D	SD	TOTAL	L.S	DF	X^2cal	X^2tab	Remark
99	90	54	57	300	0.05	12	85.216	21.026	Rejected
87	126	51	36	300					
93	48	84	75	300					
123	111	33	33	300					
123	48	63	66	300					
525	423	285	267	1500					

Decision Rule

At 12 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level, Chi – square critical value was 21.026. Since the Calculated Chi –square of 85.216 was greater than Chi- square critical table of 21.026 (X^2cal >

X^2tab), therefore, the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study" was rejected, while the alternate hypothesis which states that "there is significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study".

Discussion of Findings

From the above analysis and findings, it is clearly observed that in hypothesis one which says "there is no significant relevance of traditional institution among the people of Lagos State" with the calculated x^2 value of 84.725 at 0.05 alpha level and 12 degree of freedom is greater than the table value of 21.06 (calculated x^2> table x^2), the null hypothesis was rejected. This is supported by Babalola (2020), the reflections of the stress of the traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria are personal humiliation, salary cut, salary stoppage, restriction, suspension, banishment, dethronement and murder. However, it can be categorically stated here that all these indices are not unique to traditional institutions alone but are general phenomena affecting all classes of Nigerians in contemporary time. Thus, the position here is that the traditional rulership is not facing any crisis of relevance or survival in contemporary Nigeria. This is because it has always been relevant and has survived a lot of organized efforts to scrap it completely.

The result of the tested hypothesis two above: It is clearly stated that calculated value of 67.281 at 0.05 alpha level and 12 degree of freedom is greater than the table value of 21.06 under the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State" was rejected. This is in conformity with Sokoh (2018) who submit that the happening to the traditional institutions in contemporary Nigeria is just a manifestation of our inability to fashion out suitable political system that will reflect our social, economic and political realities as against the colonial and military imposed political structures of the colonial era and post-independence period respectively. Despite this, traditional chieftaincy institutions and traditional rulers have continued to exercise considerable influence and play an active role in the political administration at all levels of government in Nigeria albeit informally.

Traditional institution is very relevant in contemporary Nigeria but what it is clamoring for is constitutional role and recognition. The fact that a traditional institution does not enjoy constitutional recognition or responsibilities does not mean that it is not relevant or that it has outlived its importance.

From the table 5 above under the null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study", based on the finding which indicates that calculated x^2 value of 85.216 is greater than table x^2 of 21.06, the null hypothesis was rejected. This is in agreement with Edesie (2015), who submits that traditional rulers in Nigeria play an important role in the choice and emergence of electoral candidates in contemporary Nigeria in spite of their non-affiliation to any of the political parties. During the electioneering processes, political aspirants troop to palaces of traditional rulers in their communities to receive royal blessings and endorsements. As fathers to all, traditional rulers give royal blessings to all the aspirants that come to them because they all come from their domains and whoever emerges also

receives the support of the traditional rulers. Our argument here is that traditional rulers still command great respect and awe among the people of Nigeria and these accounts for their patronage by political office aspirants in the build up to elections and electioneering processes. Examples of this abound in the various parts of Nigeria during state and local government elections. Even at the federal level, presidential aspirants endeavour to visit and get the royal support of first class traditional rulers across the country.

Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained from this study, the researcher can conclude that there is there is significant relevance of traditional institution among the people of Lagos State; there is significant importance of traditional rulers to governance in Local Government Area level in Lagos State and finally, there is significant relevance of traditional rulers in governance in State level using Lagos State traditional institution as a case study. Essentially, the traditional rulers play active roles in the emergence of political leaders as well as the success of successive governments in contemporary Nigeria at all levels local, state and federal. This is in spite of their lack of constitutional recognition or specific constitutional roles.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is a need for the Federal Government to give legitimacy that traditional institutions deserve.
2. There is the need to integrate the traditional institution into the country's contemporary local government system in order to enhance a robust Political and economic development from the grassroots and foster shared institutions and cultural values which traditional authorities represent.
3. There is a need for public re-orientation on the importance of traditional institutions and how they can constitute crucial resources that have the potential to promote grassroots governance and to facilitate access of rural communities to public services.
4. Government can use traditional institutions to strengthen the local capacity for management and settlement of disputes rather than imposing the formal state legal system

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