



Article

The Role of Traditional Institutions in Peace Building and Curbing Insecurity in Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the contribution of traditional institutions to peace-building and insecurity reduction in Nigeria, with a focus on Borno State. It highlights four core functions of traditional institutions: facilitating dialogue, sharing intelligence, promoting community vigilance, and mediating conflicts. Using a survey design, data were collected from 850 residents across five communities in Borno state including Shehu, district heads, village heads, Bulama, councils of elders, community opinion leaders, and religious leaders. A sample size of 272 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed, with regression analysis conducted at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that traditional institutions significantly promote peace and security through all four mechanisms, with respondents affirming their effectiveness in mediating disputes, sharing security information, coordinating vigilance, and preventing conflicts. All null hypotheses were rejected, underscoring the importance of each role. The study recommends formally integrating traditional institutions into security frameworks, enhancing their capacity, legally recognizing their roles, and institutionalizing indigenous conflict resolution practices. Overall, the research provides empirical evidence that traditional institutions remain vital actors in fostering peace and stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Insecurity, Peace Building, Traditional Institutions, Dialogue Facilitation.

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Introduction

Peace-building is a multifaceted process that involves addressing the underlying causes of conflict, fostering reconciliation, and creating sustainable systems to prevent the recurrence of violence (Lederach, 1997; United Nations, 2007). In Nigeria, the urgency of peace-building is particularly pronounced in the North-East, where insurgency and terrorism have destabilized communities and undermined social cohesion. Borno State, in particular, remains the most affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, which has persisted for over a decade. Reports from the Global Terrorism Index (2023) and the National Bureau of Statistics indicate that Borno accounts for the largest share of terrorist-related incidents and casualties in Nigeria, with thousands killed, entire communities destroyed, and millions displaced. This alarming context underscores the need for innovative peace-building strategies tailored to the realities of Borno State.

Within this landscape of insecurity, traditional institutions in Borno State play a pivotal role in local governance and community resilience. Rooted in cultural legitimacy and historical continuity, these institutions comprising emirs, district heads, ward leaders, and community elders serve as mediators, custodians of customary law, and trusted voices within their communities. Their close ties to grassroots populations and their capacity to mobilize collective action enable them to contribute meaningfully to peace-building efforts. In areas where formal state authority is weakened by insurgency, traditional rulers have acted as stabilizing forces, facilitating dialogue, resolving disputes, and supporting reconciliation initiatives. Thus, examining the role of traditional institutions in peace-building and curbing insecurity in Nigeria, with particular reference to Borno State, offers valuable insights into how indigenous governance structures can complement formal state mechanisms in restoring peace and stability.

Insecurity continues to be a significant hurdle for Nigeria and many other African nations. Problems like terrorism, insurgency, communal violence, banditry, and kidnappings have resulted in tragic loss of life, displacement of communities, and serious disruptions to the economy. Traditionally, the response to these security threats has leaned heavily on military force and the involvement of various security agencies (Onuoha, 2020; Akinola, 2021). Yet, these force-driven strategies often fall short of truly eliminating insecurity, as they primarily tackle the symptoms of these issues while overlooking the intricate social, cultural, and political factors that fuel them (Gani & Askandar, 2025).

Take Nigeria's military efforts against Boko Haram in the North-East, for instance. Despite pouring in substantial resources and effort, the insurgency hasn't been completely eradicated, nor has the region achieved lasting stability (Obi & Davis, 2022). The same pattern can be seen in the Sahel region, where military operations against armed groups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have occasionally led to short-

term security gains but have not addressed the underlying communal and identity conflicts (Traore, 2021). On a global scale, relying solely on military force without incorporating local peace initiatives has proven to be only somewhat effective in places like Afghanistan and Somalia (Kim & Liu, 2020).

In contrast to modern systems, traditional institutions like chiefs, emirs, clan elders, and councils still wield considerable authority and respect within their communities (Agbaje, 2022). These groups are essential for mediating conflicts, maintaining social order, resolving disputes, and promoting harmony through practices and norms that are deeply rooted in the culture (Okeke, 2023). Their influence often helps bridge the divide between formal security forces and local communities, who might be wary of government agencies. The importance of traditional institutions in fostering peace has been acknowledged in various African settings. For instance, in Sierra Leone, traditional leaders played a key role in helping communities reconcile and reintegrate former combatants after the civil war (Kamara & Sesay, 2020). Similarly, in South Africa, traditional leadership has been instrumental in local peace initiatives that bolster social cohesion in rural areas (Mabena, 2021). In Nigeria, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Plateau, Kaduna, and Benue states, traditional authorities have effectively brokered peace agreements and managed grassroots conflict resolution efforts (Ibrahim, 2023; and Okoro & Suleiman, 2024).

Despite these achievements, traditional institutions often find themselves sidelined in Nigeria's formal security and peace-building frameworks. Current policies tend to favor military and police responses, frequently neglecting the advantages of incorporating traditional conflict resolution methods (Ojo, 2021). However, research suggests that blending state security strategies with traditional mediation can lead to more sustainable peace, thanks to the cultural legitimacy and trust these institutions hold within their communities (Eze & Nwankwo, 2021).

Traditional institutions are the indigenous socio-political structures and authorities that have been around long before modern governments, and in some places, they still exist alongside them. These include figures like Emirs, Obas, and Chiefs, as well as councils of elders, age-grade systems, and customary courts. They hold significant sway in their communities by enforcing customary laws, resolving conflicts, and mediating disputes. Their deep-rooted legitimacy and cultural acceptance allow them to effectively rally local populations and promote social unity.

Peace-building is generally defined as a comprehensive set of activities designed to address the root causes of conflict, foster reconciliation, strengthen institutions, and promote sustainable peace (Lederach, 1997; United Nations, 2007). It goes beyond conflict resolution by emphasizing long-term structural and

relational changes that prevent the recurrence of violence. In Nigeria, peace-building similarly involves processes such as fostering reconciliation, promoting justice, and creating mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of renewed conflict, but it is often tailored to the country's unique sociopolitical realities, including ethnic diversity, religious tensions, and governance challenges. This includes dialogue, mediation, helping former combatants reintegrate, raising community awareness, and rebuilding trust among groups in conflict. Traditional institutions often play a crucial role here, negotiating ceasefires, facilitating discussions between opposing sides, and encouraging customary practices that highlight forgiveness and coexistence.

On the flip side, insecurity in Nigeria shows up in various forms, such as terrorism (like the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East), banditry and kidnapping (especially in the North-West), communal clashes (often between farmers and herders), and political violence. These issues disrupt lives, displace communities, and hinder development. The intricate and culturally diverse nature of these conflicts often means that formal security measures alone aren't enough without localized peace initiatives. Meanwhile, the Global Peace Index 2023 places Nigeria at 152 out of 163 countries, underscoring the persistent security issues (Vision of Humanity, 2023). According to the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST, 2023), violent deaths linked to terrorism and communal conflicts surged to over 4,300 in 2022 but saw a slight drop to around 3,800 in 2023, with some of the improvement credited to community-led peace initiatives involving traditional leaders. A 2021 survey conducted by the Peace and Security Agency of Nigeria revealed that more than 60% of respondents in conflict-affected areas trusted traditional institutions more than formal security agencies for handling conflicts (Okoro & Suleiman, 2024).

The importance of this study really shines through when we look at real-life examples where traditional institutions have either helped reduce insecurity or, in some cases, struggled to do so. Take Plateau state, for instance, where traditional rulers have played a key role in brokering peace agreements between conflicting ethnic groups. In a similar vein, in Zamfara and Kaduna states, these traditional leaders have teamed up with security forces and local vigilante groups to tackle issues like banditry and kidnappings. On the flip side, in certain areas, the decline of traditional authority has been linked to rising violence, which emphasizes the need to better understand and support their role. This study, therefore, highlights how vital traditional institutions can be in enhancing ongoing peace-building efforts and tackling insecurity in Nigeria. By delving into their contributions, the challenges they face, and how they can be integrated into national strategies, it advocates for a more comprehensive, locally-focused approach to security that moves beyond just military solutions.

Insecurity in Nigeria has reached a critical point, marked by a surge in terrorism, banditry, communal clashes, kidnappings, and conflicts between herders and farmers. Even with substantial investments in military and security measures, these strategies have largely fallen short of achieving lasting peace and stability in the affected areas. The ongoing insecurity not only hampers national development but also endangers lives and diminishes public trust in government institutions. While there's been a lot of focus on the military and police forces in tackling insecurity, the role of traditional institutions those that hold cultural significance and have a strong influence at the community level has often been overlooked or sidelined in formal security discussions. This oversight continues despite clear evidence that these local bodies are essential in resolving conflicts, mediating disputes, and fostering peace within their communities.

Neglecting to incorporate traditional institutions into national peace and security strategies creates a significant gap in addressing the social and cultural aspects of insecurity. This gap makes it difficult to develop inclusive, community-based responses that can effectively reduce violence over the long term. Therefore, recognizing and leveraging the role of traditional institutions is vital for complementing formal security efforts, establishing lasting peace, and effectively addressing Nigeria's complex insecurity challenges.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions

- i. How does the role of facilitating dialogue of traditional institution enhance peace-building and in curbing insecurity in Nigeria?
- ii. Does the role of intelligence-sharing of traditional institution enhance peace-building and in curbing insecurity in Nigeria?
- iii. To what extent does the role of Community vigilance of traditional institution enhance peace-building and in curbing insecurity in Nigeria?
- iv. What is the role of Conflict Mediation and Resolution of traditional institution in peace-building and in curbing insecurity in Nigeria?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Traditional Institution

Agbaje (2022) describes traditional institutions as “indigenous governance structures that predate formal state systems, consisting of chiefs, elders, kings, clan heads, and councils who wield customary authority to regulate community affairs, settle disputes, and enforce local norms.” These institutions play a vital role in maintaining social order by mediating conflicts, mobilizing community resources for peace-

building, and preserving the cultural values that hold society together. Ibrahim (2023) adds that “traditional institutions are socio-political organizations deeply rooted in indigenous culture and history, providing informal governance through roles such as dispute resolution, justice administration, and community leadership.” Key players in these institutions include family heads, elders’ councils, and spiritual leaders, who facilitate dialogue, mediate community conflicts, and act as trusted intermediaries between communities and state actors during times of insecurity. Kagwanja and Wambua (2022) point out that “traditional institutions encompass a broad range of indigenous mechanisms including chiefs, elders, age-grade systems, and religious figures, which regulate social relations, manage resources, and administer restorative justice to prevent and resolve conflicts.” Their essential peace-building roles involve preventing conflicts through early-warning systems, reconciling after disputes, and enhancing community resilience by fostering trust among diverse groups.

Table 1 Essential Peace-Building Role

Components	Key Functions in Peace-building and Security
Chiefs, Emirs, Kings	Governance, enforcing customary law, leading conflict mediation
Elders and Councils	Arbitration, resolving disputes, negotiating peace
Clan and Family Heads	Keeping social order, rallying community action
Age-Grade Societies	Community watchfulness, imposing sanctions, preventing conflicts early
Spiritual and Religious Leaders	Providing moral guidance, fostering reconciliation, promoting and forgiveness.

The Role of Traditional Institutions in Peace-building and Coping with Insecurity: Cases from Nigeria and Africa.

Traditional institutions hold a vital place in peace-building and tackling insecurity throughout Africa, thanks to their deep-rooted legitimacy, cultural authority, and local insights. These institutions often step in as mediators, negotiators, and community mobilizers during conflicts, working alongside formal government efforts that mainly depend on military and police actions (Ibrahim, 2023; and Agbaje, 2022).

i. Conflict Mediation and Resolution.

In Nigeria, traditional rulers and councils of elders have shown their effectiveness in mediating ethno-religious and communal disputes. For instance, in Plateau State and Benue State, long-standing conflicts between farmers and herders have been eased through dialogues led by traditional leaders who craft peace agreements that respect cultural and community nuances (Okoro & Suleiman, 2024). Their participation plays a crucial role in reducing tensions at the grassroots level, promoting reconciliation, and restoring peaceful coexistence. In Ghana, paramount chiefs have also made significant contributions to peace

efforts in the Northern Region by facilitating discussions between rival ethnic groups, which resulted in a notable drop in inter-communal violence (Mensah, 2021).

ii. Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

Traditional institutions often act as early-warning systems, spotting rising tensions before they spiral into violence. In Nigeria's North-West, the collaboration of traditional leaders with security agencies in sharing intelligence has been instrumental in tackling banditry and kidnapping hotspots (Eze & Nwankwo, 2021). They leverage community networks and cultural sanctions to proactively deter violence. In Kenya, traditional elders have taken on similar roles during election seasons when the risk of violence is heightened, employing customary reconciliation methods to avert electoral conflicts (Mwangi & Wanjiru, 2022).

iii. Reintegration and Social Cohesion

When it comes to post-conflict peace-building, traditional institutions play a crucial role. Take Sierra Leone, for example. After enduring years of civil war, traditional leaders stepped up to help reintegrate former combatants into their communities. They did this through customary cleansing ceremonies and reconciliation rituals, which were key in restoring social harmony (Kamara & Sesay, 2020). In Nigeria's Northeast, traditional institutions have been pivotal in supporting government and NGO efforts aimed at deradicalizing and reintegrating former Boko Haram fighters. They've helped foster community acceptance of these ex-combatants (Ibrahim, 2023).

iv. Legitimacy and Bridging Role

One of the standout benefits of traditional institutions is their cultural legitimacy. This often makes them trusted mediators between state authorities and communities that may be feeling restless. In situations where people have lost faith in formal state actors due to issues like corruption or inefficiency, traditional rulers emerge as respected alternatives for conflict management (Kagwanja & Wambua, 2022). In Nigeria, the government has increasingly turned to traditional rulers for help with security initiatives, acknowledging their grassroots influence in steering youth away from insurgencies and criminal activities (Onuoha, 2020). Across Nigeria and the broader African continent, traditional institutions play a vital role in peace-building and managing insecurity. They mediate conflicts, prevent violence, facilitate reintegration, and serve as trusted links between communities and the state. Their contributions are essential complements to formal security systems, highlighting the importance of integrating them into national peace and security strategies.

Concept of Peace-building and Curbing Insecurity

Peace-building is a concept that goes beyond just stopping fights or signing agreements. As Lederach (cited in Kamruzzaman, 2021) puts it, it's "a comprehensive process of creating sustainable peace by addressing root causes of conflict, transforming relationships, and building societal structures that support peaceful coexistence." This really highlights how peace-building is about long-term change. Zulu and Mwangi (2023) add that "peace-building involves coordinated efforts by state and non-state actors to restore social order, rebuild trust, and promote reconciliation in post-conflict settings." They emphasize that it takes a team effort and a focus on mending the social fabric to truly achieve peace. In the context of Nigeria, Onuoha (2020) describes peace-building as "a multifaceted approach designed to integrate security, governance, justice, and development interventions aimed at reducing violence, healing divisions, and ensuring lasting peace." This shows how important it is to blend security with development efforts. When it comes to curbing insecurity, Eze and Nwankwo (2021) define it as "the deployment of both preventive and reactive measures by formal and informal actors to reduce crime, violence, and threats to human safety within a community." They highlight the need for both proactive and responsive strategies in managing security.

Suleiman and Okoro (2024) explain that "curbing insecurity entails strategies aimed at limiting the incidence and impact of violent activities through community engagement, intelligence gathering, and conflict mitigation." This points out how crucial community involvement and intelligence are in the fight against insecurity. Ibrahim (2023) views curbing insecurity as "a holistic process that encompasses law enforcement, traditional mediation, and social interventions to restore a stable and safe environment." This definition brings together formal security measures with traditional and social approaches, showing a comprehensive way to achieve safety.

Examination of Cases and Statistics in Nigeria

Cases

Farmer-Herder Conflicts in the Middle Belt: In states like Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna, there have been ongoing clashes that have led to thousands of deaths and a lot of people being displaced. Traditional leaders in these areas have been key players in negotiating ceasefires and peace agreements (Okoro & Suleiman, 2024). For instance, the peace accord in 2022, facilitated by traditional rulers in Plateau, made a significant impact by reducing violent incidents in the affected local government areas.

Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East: While military actions are at the forefront, traditional institutions have been essential in community policing and helping former insurgents reintegrate into society, promoting deradicalization through their cultural and religious influence (Ibrahim, 2023).

Banditry in the North-

West: Traditional leaders are actively involved in community discussions and early-warning systems to keep an eye on and prevent bandit activities. The partnership between elders and security agencies has led to localized peace agreements in Zamfara State, which have successfully cut down kidnappings by over 30% from 2021 to 2023 (Eze & Nwankwo, 2021).

Empirical Studies

Several studies have evaluated the traditional institutions in peace building and curbing insecurity within and outside Nigeria the notable one are, Nwoye and Nwekeaku (2023) took a closer look at traditional institutions and their strategies for resolving communal conflicts in Anambra State. Their goal was to pinpoint these traditional conflict resolution methods and see how well they adapt to the challenges of communal disputes in the area. They used a survey method, gathering data through questionnaires and interviews, all while leaning on the Marxian Conflict Theory as their analytical lens. The findings revealed that traditional institutions are quite effective in resolving communal conflicts, thanks to their culturally rooted mechanisms. These strategies are not only adaptable but can also be woven into larger conflict resolution frameworks. They recommended that the government should acknowledge and bolster these traditional institutions, incorporating them into formal conflict resolution processes. Additionally, communities should be educated on the importance of traditional methods in managing conflicts.

Again Ojo-Ebenezer (2023) explored the role of traditional institutions in conflict resolution among the okija people. The aim was to identify which traditional institutions play a part in resolving conflicts within the Okija community in the Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State. Using a qualitative approach, they selected 16 community leaders for in-depth interviews through purposive sampling. The findings highlighted that institutions like the Ezi (family), Okpara (elders), Umunna (clan members), Umuada (women born into the clan), and various religious approaches are crucial in conflict resolution. The recommendations emphasized the need to preserve traditional conflict resolution mechanisms and integrate them into modern peace-building strategies.

Similarly, Onyesoh (2021) took a closer look at Umuada, a traditional female institution in Nigeria, and its role in peacebuilding and conflict management. The goal was to delve into how Umuada contributes to these efforts in southeastern Nigeria. To do this, the study employed postcolonial indigenous feminist methodologies, which included interviews, observations, and discussions with key informants from three communities in Enugu State. The results highlighted that Umuada plays a crucial role as peace-builders, mediating conflicts and maintaining social order, particularly in scenarios where male-dominated institutions fall short. The study recommended that the Umuada model be acknowledged and integrated

into wider peace-building strategies, underscoring the importance of women's involvement in resolving conflicts.

In a 2023 study, Maigari conducted a thorough analysis of traditional institutions and their impact on peace-building in Yobe State, Nigeria, focusing on the years from 2015 to 2020. The research aimed to pinpoint the root causes of conflict, evaluate the roles of traditional institutions in fostering peace, and assess the challenges they face. Using a qualitative approach, the study relied on secondary sources like academic journals, articles, and online reports. The findings indicated that traditional institutions play a significant role in peace-building by promoting peaceful coexistence, distributing relief materials to those affected by conflict, and aiding the return and reintegration of displaced individuals. Maigari suggested that stakeholders should prioritize collaboration and amicable conflict resolution across various communities, and that traditional institutions need stronger security support to enhance their peace-building efforts.

In a 2024 study by Lamidi et al. (2019) conducted a researcher's look at the hurdles traditional institutions face when it comes to resolving intra-communal conflicts in Southwest Nigeria. They used a descriptive survey method that blended both quantitative and qualitative data. Their findings revealed that these institutions are grappling with significant challenges, such as a lack of resources, poorly developed communication systems, and internal disputes among traditional leaders. These obstacles have seriously hampered their ability to mediate and manage community conflicts effectively. To tackle these issues, the authors suggested empowering traditional institutions with better funding, enhanced communication infrastructure, and oversight from higher levels of government.

In another important study, Maikasuwa et al. (2021) explored the vital role traditional institutions play in preventing and resolving conflicts in Nigeria. They employed a descriptive research design and conducted interviews with traditional rulers in the Sanga Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The study highlighted that these rulers actively engage in conflict management by utilizing culturally rooted practices like mediation, community involvement, and rituals that foster reconciliation. The researchers concluded that traditional institutions should receive formal recognition and support within Nigeria's broader conflict management framework to maximize their effectiveness. Similarly, Nkwota and Matthew (2024) offered a thought-provoking perspective by delving into how the politicization of traditional institutions impacts national security in Nigeria. Using a qualitative data-driven analytical approach, they found that political meddling erodes the neutrality and legitimacy of traditional rulers. This interference has diminished these institutions' capacity to serve as unbiased mediators during

conflicts. The study highlighted the urgent need to remove politics from traditional institutions to restore their credibility and allow them to play a meaningful role in peace-building and security management.

Shifting the focus to civil-military relations, Aina (2025) explored the themes of leadership and trust-building in Northern Nigeria. The research examined the relationship between military personnel and local communities, emphasizing how traditional leadership can help bridge the trust divide. A conceptual and theoretical framework was employed, particularly focusing on process-based leadership and community engagement. The findings revealed that trust is essential in civil-military relations and is best nurtured through inclusive and transparent community dialogues often led by respected traditional leaders. Aina suggested that both military authorities and government institutions should invest in trust-building initiatives that incorporate traditional institutions as mediators and facilitators

Finally, Lamidi (2021) took a deep dive into the peacemaking framework of local institutions in Southwest Nigeria. By employing qualitative methods and analyzing selected case studies, the research shed light on the crucial role that traditional systems play in settling local disputes. These institutions often rely on time-honored customs and inclusive approaches to tackle conflicts right at the grassroots level. The study wrapped up with a call to bolster these traditional institutions through focused capacity-building efforts and to weave them into formal peace-building policies and programs. Together, these insightful investigations highlight the lasting importance of traditional institutions in preventing and resolving conflicts, as well as in broader peace-building initiatives throughout Nigeria. They also bring to the forefront the challenges like political meddling and limited resources that stand in the way of their full potential. The collective recommendations from these studies push for the formal integration, capacity enhancement, and depoliticization of traditional authorities as key strategies for achieving lasting peace and security in Nigeria.

Summary of the Reviewed Literature and Research Gap

Traditional institutions in Nigeria, including traditional rulers, village heads, and community elders, play a crucial role in peace-building and curbing insecurity at the grassroots level. Their cultural legitimacy enables them to facilitate dialogue based on local customs, share intelligence through close community ties, promote community vigilance via local security groups, and mediate conflicts using culturally respected methods such as family meetings and palace courts. These functions allow them to complement the formal security system, particularly in areas where state presence is limited.

However, gaps remain in the literature. Most studies have focused on specific regions like the Niger Delta areas (Nwoye & Nwekeaku, 2023; Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023 and Nkwota & Matthew, 2024) or parts of

Northern Nigeria (Maikasuwa et al., 2021; Maigari, 2023 and Aina, 2025), without offering a comprehensive view across the country. In addition, while the roles of traditional institutions are acknowledged, few studies rigorously measure their effectiveness or examine the distinct impact of each function on peace and security. Research has also leaned heavily on qualitative methods, leaving a gap for robust empirical analyses. This study addresses these shortcomings by adopting a mixed-methods approach to evaluate how dialogue facilitation, intelligence-sharing, vigilance, and conflict mediation individually and collectively contribute to peace-building in Nigeria.

Theoretical Review

Social Capital Theory, introduced by Robert D. Putnam in his influential book "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community" (2000), builds on earlier ideas from sociologists Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). They laid the groundwork for understanding this concept in the context of sociology and politics. So, what does this theory really say? At its core, Social Capital Theory suggests that the networks of relationships, shared values, trust, and social cohesion within a community play a crucial role in how effectively people can work together and govern themselves. Social capital theory emphasizes the value of social networks, trust, norms, and relationships in facilitating cooperation, reducing conflict, and achieving collective goals (Putnam, 2000). It explains how community-based ties and interpersonal trust serve as resources that individuals and groups can draw upon to resolve disputes, mobilize support, and strengthen resilience in times of crisis. Applied to peace-building, social capital highlights how trust and shared norms within a community can be leveraged to prevent conflicts from escalating and to promote reconciliation.

Putnam (2000) argues that communities rich in social capital evident through active civic participation, mutual trust, and collaboration tend to experience greater social stability, better governance, and lower levels of crime and conflict.

The theory breaks down into several key components:

- a. *Bonding Social Capital* – This refers to the strong connections among individuals who share similar backgrounds or identities, like family ties, ethnicity, or religion, often seen in traditional communities.
- b. *Bridging Social Capital* – These are the weaker ties that connect people from different social groups, fostering broader cooperation and dialogue.
- c. *Linking Social Capital* – This involves relationships between individuals and institutions that hold different levels of power or authority, such as how traditional institutions connect communities to state structures.
- d. *Trust and Reciprocity* – These are the shared norms and mutual responsibilities that encourage collective security and collaborative problem-solving.

Why is this theory important for our study? Social Capital Theory is particularly relevant when examining the role of traditional institutions in promoting peace and reducing insecurity in Nigeria. In the context of Northern Nigeria, and specifically Borno State, the application of social capital theory is particularly relevant because of the entrenched role of traditional institutions. Unlike in Southern Nigeria, where traditional rulers often play largely ceremonial roles, traditional institutions in the North such as the Shehu of Borno, district heads (Lawans), and ward heads (Bulamas) among others are deeply embedded in community governance structures. These leaders embody and sustain social capital by fostering trust, enforcing communal norms, and serving as intermediaries between citizens and state authorities. In conflict-affected areas of Borno, traditional institutions draw on these networks to mediate disputes, facilitate dialogue, and encourage collective vigilance against insecurity.

More so, localizing social capital theory in this setting, it becomes clear that the effectiveness of traditional institutions in peace-building stems not only from their formal authority but also from the social trust and cultural legitimacy they command. Their ability to mobilize communities, share intelligence with security agencies, and build solidarity across diverse groups reflects the practical application of social capital to address insecurity in Northern Nigeria. Thus, the theory provides a strong explanatory framework for understanding how traditional institutions in Borno State utilize community networks and trust to foster peace and curb insecurity. Furthermore, traditional institutions uphold cultural values, mediate conflicts, and encourage collective action, thereby strengthening both bonding and bridging social capital. Hence, applying Social Capital Theory can better understand why traditional institutions play such a crucial role in maintaining social order, boosting community awareness, and resolving conflicts. Their deep-rooted presence in the social fabric gives them a sense of legitimacy and access to information that formal state mechanisms often miss.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, we opted for a survey research design, which is perfect for gathering data from a wide population using questionnaires. This approach is ideal because it allows us to collect primary data from a large group and helps us generalize our findings. Plus, it gives us the chance to describe the current conditions and the relationships between the variables we're investigating. The research was conducted in Borno State, Nigeria, focusing on five communities: Maiduguri, Bama, Gwoza, Monguno, and Chibok. These communities were deliberately selected because they are not only accessible for data collection but also highly relevant to the study's objectives. Maiduguri, the state capital, serves as the administrative and economic hub, while Bama, Gwoza, Monguno, and Chibok have been epicenters of insurgency-related violence, displacement, and humanitarian crises over the past decade. Together, they provide a representative snapshot of Borno's diverse socio-cultural, economic, and security realities, capturing both

urban and rural perspectives. The selection also reflects areas where traditional institutions remain central to community life and play active roles in peace-building and local governance. Studying these locations therefore enhances the validity of the findings, as they embody the complexity of insecurity and highlight the significance of traditional institutions in fostering resilience and promoting peace across different contexts within the state. Table 2 presents the Hierarchical Structure five specific communities in Borno state

Table 2: Hierarchical Structure in Maiduguri, Bama, Gwoza, Monguno, and Chibok

Traditional Institutions /Cities	Maiduguri	Bama	Gwoza	Monguno	Chibok
Shehu	√	√	√	√	√
District Heads (Aja/Hakimi)	√	√	√	√	√
Village Heads (Lawan)	√	√	√	√	√
Bulama	√	√	√	√	√
Councils of Elders	√	√	√	√	√
Community Opinion Leaders	√	√	√	√	√
Religious Leaders	√	√	√	√	√

Source: African Cities Research Consortium, 2025

Keys:

Shehu: The supreme religious and political leader, head of the Borno emirate.

Aja/Hakimi: District heads who play a key role in their respective districts.

Lawan: Ward heads who are responsible for their local wards.

Bulama: Neighborhood or village heads who are often considered the most influential figures within their communities.

Table 3: Population of the Sampled Questionnaires

Traditional Institutions /Cities	Maiduguri	Bama	Gwoza	Monguno	Chibok	Total
Shehu	24	24	24	24	24	120
District Heads (Aja/Hakimi)	24	24	24	24	24	120
Village Heads (Lawan)	24	24	24	24	24	120
Bulama	24	24	24	24	24	120
Councils of Elders	24	24	24	24	24	120
Community Opinion Leaders	25	25	25	25	25	125
Religious Leaders	25	25	25	25	25	125
Total	170	170	170	170	170	850

Source: Generated from Table 2

The study focused on a population of 850 traditional institutions of selected five specific communities in Borno state. This groups of whom possess valuable insights into local governance and cultural practices that are central to the study's aims. To figure out the sample size, we used the Yamane (1973) formula:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:

- n = sample size
- N = population size (850)
- e = margin of error (0.05)

So, plugging in the numbers:

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= 850 / (1 + 850(0.05)^2) \\
 &= 850 / (1 + 850(0.0025)) \\
 &= 850 / (1 + 2.125) \\
 &= 850 / 3.125 \\
 &\approx 272
 \end{aligned}$$

This means the sample size for our study is 272 respondents.

To check the reliability of the questionnaire, we conducted a pilot test with 30 respondents from a community that wasn't part of the main study. We analyzed the responses using Cronbach's Alpha method and found a reliability coefficient of 0.82. This indicates that the instrument is both highly reliable and consistent. The collected the data using questionnaires that were personally administered. This approach was chosen to ensure high response rates and to clear up any misunderstandings about the items in the instrument. We also enlisted trained research assistants to help with data collection in communities facing language or literacy challenges. The questionnaire was carried out with the help of community leaders and through planned visits to each of the five chosen communities. Before starting, we made sure to get consent from all participants. They were reassured that their responses would be kept confidential and were encouraged to answer honestly.

The data we collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were employed to address the research questions. Regression analysis was utilized to test the research hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. This method helped us identify the strength and direction of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To tackle the research questions, we employed descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation.

Research Question 1: *How does the role of facilitating dialogue among traditional institutions contribute to peace-building and reduce insecurity in Nigeria?*

Table 2 Result from the Respondents

Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Facilitating community dialogue reduces communal tension.	272	4.25	0.76	Strongly Agree
Traditional leaders bridge ethnic differences through dialogue.	272	4.13	0.84	Agree
Dialogue led by traditional institutions leads to peace agreements.	272	4.20	0.79	Strongly Agree
Average Mean			4.19	

Source: Generated by Researcher, 2025.

The findings from the Table 1 show that facilitating dialogue among traditional institutions plays a significant role in peace-building and reducing insecurity in Nigeria. Respondents strongly agreed (mean = 4.25, SD = 0.76) that community dialogue helps to reduce communal tension, highlighting dialogue as a crucial mechanism for de-escalating conflict at the grassroots level. Similarly, participants agreed (mean = 4.13, SD = 0.84) that traditional leaders serve as bridges across ethnic divides, emphasizing their unique position in fostering understanding and collaboration between different groups. Moreover, respondents strongly agreed (mean = 4.20, SD = 0.79) that dialogue led by traditional institutions often results in peace agreements, suggesting that such processes not only calm tensions but also produce tangible resolutions.

With an overall average mean of 4.19, the results clearly indicate a strong consensus that traditional institutions through dialogue contribute significantly to peace-building efforts. This underscores the importance of leveraging traditional leadership structures as complementary actors alongside formal state mechanisms in promoting peace and reducing insecurity in Nigeria. Hence, the respondents strongly agree that the dialogue facilitated by traditional institutions plays a significant role in enhancing peace-building and reducing insecurity.

Research Question 2: Does the intelligence-sharing role of traditional institutions help enhance peace building and reduce insecurity in Nigeria?

Table 3 Result from the Respondents

Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Community leaders share intelligence with security agencies.	272	4.01	0.87	Agree
Intelligence from traditional rulers prevents attacks.	272	3.89	0.94	Agree
Traditional institutions are reliable sources of security information.	272	3.95	0.92	Agree
Average Mean		3.95		

Source: **Generated by Researcher, 2025.**

The results reveal that intelligence-sharing by traditional institutions contributes meaningfully to peace-building and the reduction of insecurity in Nigeria. Respondents agreed (mean = 4.01, SD = 0.87) that community leaders actively share intelligence with security agencies, demonstrating their role as vital links between communities and formal security structures. Participants also agreed (mean = 3.89, SD = 0.94) that intelligence provided by traditional rulers helps to prevent attacks, underscoring the preventive function of timely information-sharing. Furthermore, respondents agreed (mean = 3.95, SD = 0.92) that traditional institutions are generally reliable sources of security information, which validates their credibility as stakeholders in security management.

The overall average mean score of 3.95 indicates a strong consensus that traditional institutions, through intelligence-sharing, play an important supportive role in peace-building processes. This suggests that integrating traditional rulers into official security networks can enhance early warning systems, improve community trust in state security agencies, and ultimately contribute to reducing insecurity across Nigerian communities. Therefore, the respondents generally agree that the intelligence-sharing by traditional institutions plays a significant role in peace-building.

Research Question 3: To what extent does the community vigilance role of traditional institutions enhance peace-building and reduce insecurity in Nigeria?

Table 4 Result from the Respondents

Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Traditional leaders coordinate community watch efforts.	272	3.98	0.87	Agree
Community vigilance prevents crime escalation.	272	4.08	0.81	Agree
Youths are mobilized by elders for vigilance.	272	3.87	0.93	Agree
Average Mean		3.98		

Source: **Generated by Researcher, 2025.**

The findings indicate that the community vigilance role of traditional institutions significantly enhances peace-building and helps reduce insecurity in Nigeria. Respondents agreed (mean = 3.98, SD = 0.87) that traditional leaders coordinate community watch efforts, showing that they play an active role in

organizing grassroots security structures. Similarly, they agreed (mean = 4.08, SD = 0.81) that community vigilance prevents crime escalation, which underscores its effectiveness as a deterrent mechanism against insecurity. In addition, respondents agreed (mean = 3.87, SD = 0.93) that youths are mobilized by elders for vigilance activities, highlighting the intergenerational collaboration within communities to safeguard peace.

With an overall average mean of 3.98, the results suggest strong agreement that traditional institutions, through their coordination of vigilance activities, contribute positively to peace and security. This implies that traditional leaders, by mobilizing local structures and fostering community-based vigilance, serve as an essential complement to formal security agencies in curbing insecurity. Hence, the respondents agree that community vigilance has a positive impact on peace-building.

Research Question 4: What role do traditional institutions play in conflict mediation and resolution for peace-building and reducing insecurity in Nigeria?

Table 5 Result from the Respondents

Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Traditional rulers help settle land disputes and family issues.	272	4.23	0.74	Strongly Agree
Their involvement eases the load on formal courts.	272	4.10	0.78	Agree
Elder mediation fosters lasting peace.	272	4.15	0.76	Strongly Agree
Average Mean		4.16		

Source: **Generated by Researcher, 2025.**

The results demonstrate that traditional institutions play a significant role in conflict mediation and resolution, thereby enhancing peace-building and reducing insecurity in Nigeria. Respondents strongly agreed (mean = 4.23, SD = 0.74) that traditional rulers help in settling land disputes and family issues, highlighting their central role in addressing grassroots conflicts that might otherwise escalate. They also agreed (mean = 4.10, SD = 0.78) that the involvement of traditional leaders eases the burden on formal courts, suggesting that traditional institutions provide accessible, less formal, and community-trusted avenues for dispute settlement. Furthermore, respondents strongly agreed (mean = 4.15, SD = 0.76) that elder mediation fosters lasting peace, emphasizing the importance of wisdom, cultural legitimacy, and communal trust in traditional dispute resolution processes. The overall average mean of 4.16 reflects strong consensus that traditional institutions contribute positively to peace-building through mediation and resolution mechanisms. This implies that their continued recognition and integration into formal

peace and security structures could enhance justice delivery, reduce pressure on state institutions, and promote enduring peace in Nigerian communities. Therefore, the respondents are in strong agreement that conflict mediation by traditional institutions is effective for peace-building.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study underscore the continuing relevance of traditional institutions in promoting peace and curbing insecurity in Nigeria, especially in conflict-prone regions such as Borno State. The findings revealed that traditional rulers play vital roles in facilitating dialogue, mediating conflicts, and promoting community vigilance, which significantly contribute to local peace-building processes. These outcomes reflect the strong trust communities place in their traditional leaders and align with the argument that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms remain critical where formal state institutions are weak or absent. This is particularly evident in rural and semi-urban areas of Borno, where the authority of the Shehu of Borno and subordinate district and ward heads continue to carry social legitimacy.

The study's findings are corroborated by Akinwale (2010), Maikasuwa et al. (2021), Nwoye and Nwekeaku (2023) and Nkwota & Matthew (2024) who observed that traditional rulers remain central to peace-building efforts across Nigeria, especially through dispute resolution and community engagement. Similarly, Olaniyan and Alao (2018), Maigari (2023) and Aina (2025) emphasized that community-based intelligence networks facilitated by traditional institutions enhance early-warning systems against insurgent activities, echoing this study's results on intelligence-sharing and vigilance. On the other hand, some scholars argue that traditional institutions may have limited influence due to political interference and declining authority in modern governance structures (Ekeh, 2020; Ojo-Ebenezer, 2023 and Nkwota & Matthew, 2024). This contrasting view suggests that while traditional institutions remain important, their effectiveness may vary depending on political context and the level of collaboration with formal security agencies. Hence, integrating both supportive and divergent perspectives in peace-building in those communities serves as the role of traditional institutions in peace-building is significant but not without challenges. Their effectiveness depends on the interplay between cultural legitimacy, political recognition, and institutional support. This underscores the need for deliberate policy efforts to formalize the involvement of traditional institutions in national peace and security frameworks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study took a closer look at how traditional institutions contribute to peace-building and tackle insecurity in Nigeria, focusing on four key areas: promoting dialogue, sharing intelligence, fostering community vigilance, and mediating conflicts. The research was motivated by the growing importance

of these institutions in a time of widespread insecurity and the need for community-based conflict management strategies.

- i. Traditional leaders are essential in encouraging open conversations among conflicting parties within their communities. Their culturally recognized authority allows them to unite opposing groups and guide discussions that foster reconciliation and social harmony.
- ii. Traditional institutions act as vital links between local communities and formal security agencies. With their strong presence in the community, they collect, verify, and share important intelligence that helps prevent crime and address emerging security challenges.
- iii. The concept of community vigilance, often led by traditional authorities, strengthens early warning systems and adds a layer of security through local watch groups. These systems not only deter crime but also respond effectively to security issues.
- iv. Traditional leaders are widely regarded as impartial mediators in disputes. They utilize indigenous knowledge and customary laws to resolve personal and community conflicts in ways that are culturally appropriate and accessible to the people.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for curbing insecurity in Nigeria through the effective engagement of traditional institutions in peace building:

- i. Policy Integration: The Nigerian government should formally integrate traditional institutions into both national and local security frameworks. This requires clearly defining their roles and establishing mechanisms for collaboration with conventional security agencies.
- ii. Capacity Building: Traditional rulers and their councils should be provided with continuous training in areas such as conflict management, intelligence gathering, and peace building strategies. Such training will enhance their effectiveness and ensure their practices are aligned with modern security approaches.
- iii. Legal Recognition and Support: It is necessary to enact new legislation or review existing laws to explicitly outline the authority, responsibilities, and protections of traditional institutions in matters of peace and security. Legal backing will strengthen their legitimacy and operational effectiveness.
- iv. Community-Based Security Frameworks: Federal, state, and local governments should support the establishment of community vigilance structures coordinated by traditional rulers. These grassroots systems will help to build trust and ensure timely responses to security challenges.
- v. Strengthening Dialogue Mechanisms: Institutional frameworks for regular dialogue and mediation should be created or reinforced, with traditional leaders serving as facilitators. This is particularly important in conflict-prone regions, where early dialogue can prevent escalation.

vi. Documentation of Indigenous Practices: Efforts should be made to systematically document and institutionalize indigenous conflict resolution practices. Preserving these practices will ensure their continuity and allow for adaptation across diverse cultural settings.

Implementing these recommendations will not only strengthen the role of traditional institutions in peace building but also contribute significantly to addressing insecurity in Nigeria. By combining indigenous systems with modern governance structures, Nigeria can foster a more inclusive, community-driven, and sustainable security framework.

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