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TRADITIONAL RULERS AND TOWN UNION EXECUTIVES AS A FUNCTIONAL CORRELATE IN THE PROVISION OF SECURITY IN IGBO COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Traditional institutions in Igbo societies are important institutions in governance in Igbo societies. They are the custodians of culture and traditions. The traditional rulers and town union executives have been partners in progress when it comes to the provision of security of lives and properties in Igbo societies. The research adopted the descriptive research design, and was guided by three (3) research objectives. The population of the study was 3324 respondents. Out of the number, a sample size of 1821 respondents were drawn using Taro Yamane formula for the sample size which spread across the communities selected for the study. The data was analysed using Linear Regression analysis for thorough analysis. The findings of the study show that there is positive correlation between the traditional institutions in handling security matters and challenges: the findings also revealed amongst others that the most affected areas by insecurity in Igbo societies include low agricultural productivity by farmers, economic disempowerment, human right and others too numerous to mention. Therefore, the research recommends among others that there should be a positive synergy between the governments in Igbo societies and the traditional institutions, and town unions in the south –east, Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: Traditional Rulers, Town union Executive, security, Igbo communities

INTRODUCTION

The growing sophistication of security issues in Nigeria, particularly in the South East region of Nigeria has become a major challenge to the rural Igbo communities. Today, Chinwe et al (2019) contend that kidnapping, rape, robbery, theft of antiquity..., attack by Fulani herdsmen among others have become major problems facing many indigenous Igbo communities. Insecurity is a situation where lives and property are not safe. It is a state which lives and property are in danger. He went

further by saying that insecurity means a condition in which there is incessant loss of lives and property (Ogbuehi 2018). Therefore, this work intends to examine the roles played by traditional rulers and town union executives in the provision of security in Nigeria. These institutions in Igbo societies particularly the traditional rulers and town unions are partners in progress in ensuring that peace and progress is achieved in their various communities.

In Igbo society, the traditional institutions are headed by traditional rulers. They are the custodian of the cultural values, the ancient traditions, chieftaincy institutions, traditional festivals among others. Nwizu (2019), says that these are traditional functions that are assigned to them that makes them mouth piece of Igbo communities, particularly in the pre-colonial Igbo democratic society. Chardwick (2025), described them as a political group of individuals who were selected or chosen democratically by the people to run the affairs of both the town union and the various components of the village. These affairs in Igbo society range from the rural development, industrialization, commercial activities, clearing of village square among others. According to Njoku (2024), Igbo traditional rulers and town union executives were made in such a way that power and authority in Igbo societies do not lend themselves to the Eze or executive members of the town union rather, power and authority belong to the people who appointed them. Though through the general will of the people these institutions exercise powers that can make them punish others if they do not obey their orders.

Although in Igbo communities according to Uwakwe (2025), these institutions have a little characteristic of dominance as well as an indispensable characteristic of imposition of sanction for non-compliance. So, the two major functions or roles these two important institutions play in Igbo communities are maintenance of peace and security by forming local vigilantes, hunter groups who help the communities to drive away the Fulani herdsmen from their forestry and farmlands.

THE PROBLEMATIQUE

Traditional institutions in the pre-colonial traditional political system are the custodian of cultures and traditions particularly in Igbo society. The traditional rulers and town union executives have been working hand in hand to provide a system of administration that is in consistence with the modern local government system in Nigeria. Traditional rulers and town union executive have been playing a very significant role of sustaining culture and traditions, maintenance of peace and security right from the advent of colonial rule till date. But surprisingly, it is speculated by the members of the public that traditional institutions in Igbo land are no longer efficient and effective in the provision of security in their various communities despite some security measures being put in place by the state and local governments. One begins to wonder what might have been the cause of these persistent killing in Igbo communities by bandits and Fulani herdsmen. However, there is hardly any empirical study to show how security problems are handled and tackled by traditional rulers and town union executives in Igbo communities. This is the reason for this research.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine the correlational functions of the traditional rulers and town union executives in the provision of security in Igbo communities in the South East, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the various methods/approaches these institutions adopt in solving insecurity problems in the areas understudy,
2. examine the involvement or support given to those institutions by government agencies, such as the police, army, and other governmental agencies,
3. find out the major challenges facing the traditional rulers and town union executives in carrying out these functions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional institutions in Nigeria have shown resilience, especially when the state is often perceived to be an avenue for exploitation and self-enrichment (Nwapi and Elendu, 2024). Ogunna in Irokansi (2024), opines that traditional ruler is a traditional authority of a local community selected or appointed and installed through traditional process and norms. Afe (2024), observes that the concept of traditional rulership in Nigeria predates the nations colonial era, forming one of the very cores of government and administration. In the same vein, Kane (2025) conceptualizes the traditional ruler as the pillar of every community in Igbo land, their role in various communities in the area of customs and traditions cannot be over emphasized. They are considered to be custodians of culture and tradition, and held highly when it comes to securing their ancestral homes and villages. The pre-colonial Igbo societies according to Ikemba (2024), features a well-structured system of administration where authority and power belong to the people who appointed the traditional ruler. Unlike other traditional systems in Nigeria such as the Yoruba political system and Hausa political system where power and authority are centralized. Though in Yoruba traditional political system, they have semi-centralized political administration, where there are checks and balances. The Igbo have a unique traditional system of administration where they commonly say “Igbo enwe Eze” (the Igbo has no King). By this according to Ogini (2024), the Igbo people have no much respect for their traditional rulers. Though traditional rulers alongside other traditional institutions such as the elders of thought, town union executives, leaders of Age Grades, usually hold periodic meetings in the village square to discuss social issues and also educate the people on matters of peace, security of the community, harmony, and co-existence of their societies. The Igbo societies according to Ikenna (2025), have faced security challenges such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, communal clashes, and farmer-herder conflicts. These security challenges started since 2014, followed with the incarceration of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu in Nigeria. These security challenges have resulted in loss of lives, displacement, and economic instability in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY AND MATERIALS

A descriptive survey design was used to select the number of the ten communities drawn from the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo in the South East zone of Nigeria. The purposive sampling technique is appropriate to this study in the sense that the researchers used purposive sampling to select the ten communities in the states in the south east region of Nigeria. The reason for the selection is to save cost, energy and time due to security challenges facing the region as at the time of this research. Also, it would enable the researcher to easily access and collect the needed data in the communities studied.

The study has a population of 3324 respondents. Out of the number, a sample size of 1821 respondents were drawn using the Taro Yamane formula of sample size which spread across the (10) communities selected for this study. The communities are Okigwe, Orlu, Bende, Isukwuato, Afikpo, Ohaozara, Obollo-Afor, Nsukka, Aguata and Ihiala, all the communities are in the South East of Nigeria. In each of the ten communities, a convenient sample technique was used to collect the data. This method is appropriate in this study because it helped the researchers to collect data from any person within the field that gave consent to be part of the response for the study.

The instrument for this study was a self-developed questionnaire named “Traditional Rulers and Town Union Executives as a Functional Correlate in the Provision of Security in Igbo Communities in the South East, Nigeria.” The data collected were analysed using linear regression analysis for thorough analysis. 1821 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. While 1686 copies were retrieved and used for further analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 1686 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents comprising the village heads, council chiefs, vigilante groups in each community studied, youth leaders, and police officers in the communities studied. The people who are indigenes of the communities were selected because they live at home and are educated enough, and also deemed knowledgeable in the relationship between provision of security in Igbo communities and Traditional institutions in the South East, Nigeria. Out of the 1821 copies of the questionnaire administered, 1686 were filled and returned, thus amounting to 83% response rate.

Table 1: Summary of the Linear Regression Analysis on the Methods/ Approaches adopted by these communities in solving insecurity Problems

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of Estimate	Decision
1	0.15a	019	017	214	Positive

Predictor: (Constant), Causes of Insecurity

Data presented on Table 1 show the summary of linear regression analysis for the methods adopted by the communities. The analysis shows that the correlation (R) between the predictor variable (causes of insecurity) and the criterion variable (approaches/methods adopted) is 0.15a. The r of the analysis

being 0.15a implies that a positive relationship exists between insecurity and approaches or methods adopted in handling security challenges in the South-East region of Nigeria. The methods/approaches adopted by these communities include community policing, vigilante groups, surveillance by the youths in various communities to check the activities of the Fulani herdsmen in their farmlands and also the use of village hunters' association in the various communities. Therefore, the methods/approaches adopted have implications on the control of reducing the attacks and frequent killing of farmers in the farmlands by the Fulani herdsmen as well as reducing of banditry in the various communities in the South East zone of Nigeria.

Table 2: Summary of the Linear Analysis on the involvement or Support given to those institutions by Government

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Standard. Error of the Estimate	Decision
1	0.18	0.52	44	2.18	Positive

Predictor: (constant), support from the Government

Information presented on Table 2 show the summary of linear regression analysis for the relationship between support given to traditional institution and Town Union Executives by their various Local Governments and State Governments, and the criterion variable (insecurity) is 0.18. The r of the analysis being 0.18 implies that a positive relationship exist between the involvement of various levels of governments in supporting the communities and traditional institutions in handling insecurity challenges in their various communities. Such supports are in the areas of government given the institutions financial support, vehicles, mobilizing police and the Nigerian army and other security agencies in terms of needs and during emergency situations. This positive relationship reveals that there is a positive synergy between the traditional institutions, town unions and the governments in handling the challenges of insecurity in South-East communities in Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of the Linear Regression Analysis on the major challenges facing the various institutions in tackling insecurity problems in their communities

Model	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-Square	Standard. Error of the Estimate	Decision
1	0.24a	0.46	0.49	3.41	Positive

Predictor: (constant), challenges of Insecurity

Table 3 shows the summary of linear regression analysis for the challenges encountered by traditional institutions in tackling insecurity problems in their various communities. The analysis shows that the correlation (R) between the predictor variable (challenges) and the criterion variable (insecurity) is 0.24a. The r of the analysis being 0.24a implies that a positive relationship exists between insecurity

and pro-active measures taken by traditional institutions, Town Unions and Government in tackling security challenges. This positive relationship implies that security challenges such as sabotage by various individuals in the various communities, inability of the government to give rapid response during emergency, the type of weapons used by the village vigilantes compared to the ones used by Fulani Herdsman among others.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on the research questions posed to guide this study, the following were stated as the summary of findings:

- i. The findings of the study revealed that there is a positive correlation between the traditional institutions in handling security challenges in the South-East communities in Nigeria.
- ii. The findings of the study also revealed that the environment areas mostly affected insecurity problems and challenges in the South-East. Nigeria has low agricultural productivity because farmers do not go to farm again due to fear of Fulani Herdsmen, kidnappers and other social vices.
- iii. The findings of the study revealed that the impact of insecurity problems was (R)devastating to an extent that the communities in the region have witnessed economic disempowerment, human rights violation, social disorder, unnecessary migrations to other regions of Nigeria due to the menace of Fulani Headsmen and bandits in the various communities.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study is longitudinal study of the correlational type. Though studies abound on the topic of the study, but to the knowledge of the researchers, none of them is on the communities covered by, this study in terms of geography. It therefore concludes that a more attention on the synergy between traditional institutions, town unions, and the various levels of government in South-East region, Nigeria, so as to reduce the level of security problems in the region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that insecurity problems such as the activities of Fulani herdsmen, banditry, kidnapping and other social vices are caused by Government neglect on their political campaigns during elections that are not fulfilled when voted into power; as well as the inadequate responsibilities of the various levels of government in addressing injustice and marginalization of ethnic groups and power dominance, couple with the level of poverty that is ravaging the people. The research, therefore, recommends that there should be a positive synergy between the government and the traditional institutions and town unions and various communities in the South-East region of Nigeria in order to combat the challenges or problems of insecurity. Secondly, government at various levels should empower the various institutions and security agencies by giving them enough funds, and other logistics that will enable them to perform effectively. Thirdly, the governors of Imo, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Anambra states should set up a committee that should from time to time have town hall meeting with the various communities on security matters.

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