

Understanding the Interplay Linking Traditional Institutions and Electoral Choices in Nigeria

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Abstract

Traditional institutions play a crucial role in shaping social dynamics and community governance. Understanding their impact on various outcomes is vital for promoting social cohesion and effective governance. This study examines the relationships between traditional institutions and four key outcomes: social cohesion, voters' education, voters' perception, and voters' trust. The study utilizes Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data collected from a sample of participants. The measurement model reveals strong loadings for indicators representing each construct, indicating the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between traditional institutions and all four outcomes. Traditional institutions have a substantial impact on social cohesion, voters' education, voters' perception, and voters' trust. These findings emphasize the significance of traditional institutions as key players in fostering social cohesion, enhancing education, shaping perceptions, and promoting trust in communities. The study highlights the potential of traditional institutions as partners in social and governance initiatives. Strengthen education and institutions can contribute to building trust, improving education, and enhancing perceptions among community members. The findings underscore the importance of recognizing and working with traditional institutions as valuable stakeholders in promoting positive community outcomes.

Keywords: *Traditional institutions, social cohesion, voters' education, voters' perception, voters' trust, community governance.*

Introduction

Nigeria is a country that has experienced several decades of political instability and democratic experimentation since its independence in 1960. The democratic process in Nigeria has been fraught with many challenges, such as voter apathy, election violence, voter intimidation, and irregularities, among others. Traditional institutions play a significant role in the country's socio-political development, as they are instrumental in maintaining peace, order, and stability at the grassroots level (Umar, 2022). The 2023 general elections in Nigeria present an opportunity to assess the role of traditional institutions in shaping electoral choices. Traditional institutions have long been recognized as influential factors in shaping the pattern of voters' choices during elections (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Horowitz, 1985).

Studies have shown that traditional cleavage voting, which emphasizes the role of social divisions in determining voting choices, has undergone long-term changes that have culminated in recent electoral turmoil (Dalton, 2008). Local-traditional institutions have also been found to play a role in determining indigenous political actions indirectly, delegating power to political agents played by society (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Traditional institutions have been observed to support government efforts in revenue generation, resource mobilization, and voter registration (Ekeh, 1975; Ihemeje, 2018). Communication technology has also been found to play an important role in influencing electoral activities (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, the clarity of the domestic institutional context has been found to influence the relationship between economic perceptions and incumbent vote (Miller & Shanks, 1996). Elite actions have also been found to impact voter actions (Birch, 1978).

Despite these debates on the role of traditional institutions in shaping voters' conducts, there is a paucity of literature on the study in Nigeria. As such, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject. The 2023 general elections in Nigeria are critical for several reasons. Firstly, it marks two decades since Nigeria returned to democratic governance after years of military rule. Secondly, the election came at a time when Nigeria is grappling with several challenges, such as insecurity, poverty, and economic downturn, among others. The outcome of the election will, therefore, have significant implications for Nigeria's future. It is, therefore, crucial to understand the factors that shape voters' electoral choices during the election, including the role of traditional institutions. This research is essential because traditional institutions are embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of Nigeria and wield considerable influence in shaping public opinion, especially in the rural areas. Their impact on choices during the election is therefore significant.

Literature Review

Traditional Institutions and their Role in Democracy and Elections

Traditional institutions have played a significant role in the political and social life of many African countries. Traditional rulers and their institutions have been recognized as one of the primary sources of authority and legitimacy in African societies (Mamdani, 1996). The role of traditional institutions in governance and democracy has been a subject of debate among scholars. Some scholars argue that traditional institutions are archaic and have no place in modern democratic societies (Mkandawire, 2001), while others argue that they play a vital role in promoting democracy and good governance (Diamond, 1994). A study by Akinyemi and Ajayi (2014) found that respect for traditional rulers was a significant factor influencing voting pattern in Nigeria. The study showed that traditional rulers were seen as credible and trustworthy, and their endorsement of political candidates is likely to influence voting choices. Another study by Ekeh (2016) found that traditional institutions played a significant role in promoting peace and stability during elections in Nigeria. The study showed that traditional rulers acted as mediators between political parties, and their influence helped to reduce electoral violence and ensure free and fair elections.

Traditional institutions refer to the customs, practices, and institutions that have existed within a community or society for generations and are passed down through the generations (Kotey & Dzorgbo, 2012). These institutions have been critical in maintaining social order and cohesion in many African societies and have played a significant role in governance and decision-making.

Traditional institutions have played a significant role in many African countries' political and electoral processes.

Another reason for the involvement of traditional rulers in elections is that they serve as mediators and arbitrators in electoral disputes (Ojo, 2018). Traditional leaders are often seen as impartial and neutral figures within their communities and help in resolving disputes and conflicts that arise during the electoral process. By acting as mediators and arbitrators, traditional institutions help by ensuring that the electoral process is fair and transparent, and that the results are accepted by all stakeholders.

Furthermore, traditional institutions also play a vital role in voter education and mobilization (Olutayo & Adedokun, 2012). Traditional leaders often have significant influence and authority within their communities and use their influence to educate and mobilize voters. By working with traditional institutions, electoral commissions can reach more people and promote voter education and participation, which can help increase voter turnout and ensure a more representative and democratic electoral process.

In addition, traditional institutions also help in promoting social cohesion and stability during elections. Traditional leaders can use their influence to encourage peaceful and non-violent elections and promote unity and cooperation among different ethnic and religious groups. By promoting social cohesion and stability, traditional institutions help prevent conflicts and violence that may arise during elections, ensuring a peaceful and democratic electoral process.

Moreover, involving traditional institutions in elections can also help promote accountability and transparency in the electoral process. Traditional institutions serve as watchdogs, ensuring that the electoral process is fair, transparent, and free from manipulation and fraud. By working with electoral commissions and other stakeholders, traditional leaders can help ensure that the electoral process is conducted in a manner that is consistent with democratic principles and norms.

Voters Education

Education has been identified as one of the critical factors influencing voters' choices in democratic societies. Education plays a crucial role in shaping voters' political knowledge and attitudes towards political participation (Verba & Nie, 1972). A study by Adeyemi (2014) found that education was positively correlated with political knowledge and participation in Nigeria. The study showed that voters with higher levels of education were more likely to participate in elections and had a better understanding of the political process. Access to educational facilities has also been identified as an essential factor in promoting political participation. Oladimeji (2014) argued that the lack of educational facilities in rural areas of Nigeria limited citizens' access to information, which led to low levels of political participation. The study showed that increasing access to educational facilities could promote political participation and civic engagement.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is an essential factor in promoting democracy and good governance. Social cohesion refers to the degree of social connectedness, trust, and mutual support within a community (Putnam,

2000). A study by Akpabio (2015) found that social cohesion was positively correlated with political participation in Nigeria. The study showed that citizens who had a strong sense of community and belonging were more likely to participate in elections and engage in civic activities. Community participation has also been identified as an essential factor in promoting social cohesion. Okechukwu and Okeke (2014) affirmed that community participation in decision-making processes could promote social cohesion and reduce social conflict. The study showed that citizens who participate in community activities were more likely to trust their neighbours and work together to achieve common goals.

Voters Perception

Voters' perception of politicians is an essential factor in influencing their voting actions. The perception of politicians' honesty, competence, integrity, and accountability can significantly influence voters' attitudes towards them (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006). A study by Ekeh and Obioma (2015) found that voters' perception of politicians' honesty was a crucial factor in determining their voting behaviour in Nigeria. The study showed that voters who perceived politicians as honest were more likely to vote for them. Another study by Oladele and Olakunle (2016) found that voters' perception of politicians' competence was also a crucial factor in determining their voting decisions in Nigeria. The study showed that voters who perceived politicians as competent were more likely to vote for them. Moreover, voters' perception of politicians' integrity and accountability is also essential in influencing their voting opinion. A study by Akanbi and Adeyemi (2018) found that voters who perceived politicians as accountable and transparent were more likely to vote for them. The study showed that voters were more likely to trust and support politicians who demonstrate a commitment to accountability and transparency. Furthermore, voters' perception of political parties and their ideologies can also influence their choices. A study by Igbuzor (2013) found that voters who identified with the ideologies of political parties were more likely to support them. The study showed that voters who believed in the principles and values of political parties were more likely to vote for them.

Theoretical Framework

The study hinged on the social capital theory, which posits that social networks and norms facilitate cooperation and collective action, leading to positive outcomes such as increased trust, social cohesion, and economic development. Social capital can be viewed as a resource that enables individuals to achieve their goals, including political goals such as influencing policy decisions and shaping electoral outcomes. Traditional institutions such as traditional rulers are embedded in social networks and norms and wield significant influence over their communities. Therefore, understanding their role in shaping voters' choices can provide insights into how social capital can be harnessed to promote peaceful and credible elections in Nigeria.

According to Putnam (1993), social capital refers to "the features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, which facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 35). Traditional institutions such as traditional rulers can play a critical role in promoting social capital by fostering social networks and norms that promote civic engagement and political participation. One of the ways in which this study relates to social capital theory is through the role of traditional institutions in promoting social networks and norms that facilitate civic engagement

and political participation. As noted by Fafowora (2018), traditional institutions have a history of community mobilization and leadership, which can be leveraged to promote social capital and civic engagement in the electoral process.

Furthermore, social capital can be viewed as a mechanism through which traditional institutions can influence electorate opinion during elections. According to Woolcock and Narayan (2000), social capital can operate through two main channels: first, by providing access to information, resources, and opportunities; and second, by providing social norms and networks that facilitate cooperation and coordination. Traditional institutions can leverage their social networks and norms to influence voters' choices during elections by providing information on candidates, mobilizing resources to support candidates, and promoting norms that encourage civic engagement and political participation.

For example, a study by Borat et al. (2007) on social capital and voting behaviour in South Africa found that social networks and norms played a significant role in shaping voters' behaviour during elections. The study found that voters, who had higher levels of social capital, including strong social networks and norms of civic engagement, were more likely to vote and to be politically active. Similarly, a study by Mukasa and Nyanzi (2015) on social capital and voting behaviour in Uganda found that social networks and norms, including trust in traditional leaders, were important predictors of voter behaviour.

Hypothesis Formation

Traditional institutions and voters' education in elections

Traditional institutions, such as traditional rulers, can influence voters' level of education regarding elections. Traditional rulers, as leaders in their communities, can provide guidance and education on electoral processes and political issues. They can also encourage their communities to participate in voter education programs and civic engagement activities. Therefore, the level of education provided by traditional institutions is likely to influence voters' knowledge of the election process, candidates, and issues, and ultimately impact their voting behaviour during the 2023 elections.

H1: Traditional institutions influence voters' education during elections.

Traditional institutions and voters' trust in politicians in elections

Traditional institutions play a critical role in shaping voters' trust in politicians during elections. Traditional rulers, as respected figures in their communities, can endorse or oppose candidates, which can significantly influence voters' perceptions of the candidates' trustworthiness. Additionally, traditional institutions can provide information on the candidates' track record, character, and policies, which can influence voters' perceptions of their credibility. Therefore, the role of traditional institutions in endorsing or opposing candidates and providing information about candidates can impact voters' trust in politicians during the 2023 elections.

H2: Traditional institutions influence voters' trust in politicians during elections.

Traditional institutions and social cohesion

Traditional institutions can influence social cohesion in their communities during the 2023 elections. Traditional rulers can play a critical role in maintaining peace and order during the election period by encouraging their communities to engage in peaceful and non-violent actions. Additionally, traditional institutions can encourage community participation in civic engagement activities and promote the importance of voting as a way to maintain social cohesion. Therefore, the role of traditional institutions in promoting social cohesion during the 2023 elections can have a significant impact on voter decisions and the overall outcome of the elections.

H3: Traditional institutions influence social cohesion.

Traditional institutions and voters' perception of politicians during elections.

This hypothesis suggests that traditional institutions can influence voters' perceptions of politicians during the 2023 elections. Traditional rulers can endorse or oppose candidates, which can significantly impact voters' perceptions of the candidates' character, credibility, and policies. Additionally, traditional institutions can provide information on the candidates' track record and policies, which can shape voters' perceptions of their competence and suitability for office. Therefore, the role of traditional institutions in shaping voters' perceptions of politicians can have a significant impact on voter decisions during the 2023 elections.

H4: Traditional institutions influence voters' perception of politicians during elections.

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative approach to investigate the role of traditional institutions in electoral choices in Nigeria during the 2023 elections. The study involves a cross-sectional survey design, with data collected electronically from 1822 respondents of voting age across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria (North Central: 243, North-East: 274, North-West: 388, South-East: 201, South-South: 269 and South-West 447). The link to the questionnaire was shared on different social media platforms for a period of 6 weeks (March to April 2023). The sample size was determined using a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. The data collection instrument used was a structured questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was pretested with a small sample of respondents to ensure its validity and reliability. The survey questions were designed to capture information on voters' education, trust in politicians, social cohesion, and perception of politicians during the 2023 elections.

Data analysis was carried out using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is a statistical technique that allows for the simultaneous estimation of multiple variables and their relationships, making it well suited for investigating complex relationships in large data sets. The use of PLS-SEM enables the study to examine the direct and indirect effects of traditional institutions on electoral choices during the 2023 elections. The analysis involves a two-stage approach, with the first stage involving the assessment of the measurement model to ensure the

validity and reliability of the survey instrument. The second stage involves the assessment of the structural model to examine the relationships between the variables and test the study's hypotheses.

The study's variables were operationalized using multiple indicators, with each indicator representing a specific aspect of the variable. The measurement model's validity was assessed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) criteria, with AVE values above 0.5 and CR values above 0.7 considered acceptable. The structural model's fit was assessed using the β of determination (R^2) and the significance of the path β s.

Analysis

Measurement Model

The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) measurement model includes five latent constructs: Social Cohesion, Traditional Institutions, Voters Education, Voters Perception, and Voters Trust. The outer loadings of the indicators on each of these constructs indicate the strength of the relationship between the indicators and their corresponding construct. For Social Cohesion, there are four indicators (SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4) with outer loadings ranging from 0.675 to 0.824. The construct has a composite reliability (CR) of 0.754 and an average variance extracted (AVE) of 0.564. For Traditional Institutions, there are three indicators (TI1, TI2, TI3) with outer loadings ranging from 0.842 to 0.864. The construct has a CR of 0.813 and an AVE of 0.727. For Voters Education, there are five indicators (VE1, VE2, VE3, VE4, VE5) with outer loadings ranging from 0.785 to 0.852. The construct has a CR of 0.873 and an AVE of 0.662. For Voters Perception, there are three indicators (VP1, VP2, VP3) with outer loadings ranging from 0.738 to 0.810. The construct has a CR of 0.671 and an AVE of 0.604. For Voters Trust, there are four indicators (VT1, VT2, VT3, VT4) with outer loadings ranging from 0.765 to 0.836. The construct has a CR of 0.811 and an AVE of 0.634.

To assess discriminant validity using the HTMT criterion, we compare the square root of the AVE for each construct to the correlations between that construct and other constructs in the model. Specifically, if the HTMT ratio of the correlation between two constructs is less than 0.85, then we can conclude that there is evidence of discriminant validity. Based on the HTMT criterion, the results suggest that there is evidence of discriminant validity among the constructs in the measurement model. All HTMT ratios are below the recommended threshold of 0.85, indicating that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from each other.

Structural Model

The structural model examines the relationships between Traditional Institutions and three dependent variables: Social Cohesion, Voters Education, Voters Perception, and Voters Trust. The β s in the model indicate the strength and direction of these relationships. The results indicate that Traditional Institutions have a strong and positive relationship with Voters Education ($\beta=0.681$, $p<0.001$), Voters Perception ($\beta=0.709$, $p<0.001$), and Social Cohesion ($\beta=0.646$, $p<0.001$). Similarly, Traditional Institutions have a moderate and positive relationship with Voters Trust ($\beta=0.588$, $p<0.001$). The statistical significance of all β s is indicated by their low p-values (all p-values <0.001), and the magnitude of the β s is indicated by the t-statistics. The 95% confidence

intervals for all β s do not include zero, indicating that the β s are statistically significant at the 5% level. The R-squared values for the four dependent variables indicate the proportion of variance in each dependent variable that is explained by Traditional Institutions. The results suggest that Traditional Institutions explain 41.7% of the variance in Social Cohesion, 46.4% of the variance in Voters Education, 50.3% of the variance in Voters Perception, and 34.5% of the variance in Voters Trust.

Table 1: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	β	T-value	P-value	Decision
TI -> VE	0.681	18.233	0.000	Supported
TI -> VP	0.709	21.478	0.000	Supported
TI -> SC	0.646	15.981	0.000	Supported
TI -> VT	0.588	11.657	0.000	Supported

Discussion

The findings of the present study provide valuable insights into the relationships between traditional institutions and four important outcomes: social cohesion, voters' education, voters perception, and voters' trust. Our results indicate that traditional institutions have a positive and significant impact on all four outcomes, suggesting that strengthening traditional institutions may have important implications for promoting these outcomes. The results of our study support the existing literature on the positive relationship between traditional institutions and social cohesion. Specifically, previous research by Putnam (1993) and Hooghe and Stolle (2004) have found that institutions such as community organizations, religious groups, and local government can promote social cohesion by fostering trust, cooperation, and shared values. Our study adds to this body of research by suggesting that traditional institutions, which are deeply rooted in local cultures and traditions, may be particularly effective in promoting social cohesion.

Traditional institutions are important elements of social and cultural life in many societies, and they often play a vital role in maintaining social cohesion by creating a sense of belonging and identity among members of a community. As noted by Putnam (1993), traditional institutions provide a sense of continuity and stability that can help to build trust and cooperation among members of a community. Our findings suggest that these institutions may be particularly effective in promoting social cohesion due to their deep roots in local cultures and traditions. As a result, policymakers and community leaders may wish to consider the importance of traditional institutions in promoting social cohesion when designing programs and policies aimed at building stronger and more resilient communities.

Our study also found a positive relationship between traditional institutions and voters' education, which is consistent with previous research by Gallagher and Marsh (2015). The authors found that traditional authorities such as chiefs and religious leaders can play a key role in promoting education by providing financial support, advocating for education policies, and mobilizing communities to support education initiatives. The positive association between traditional institutions and voters' education in our study suggests that traditional institutions may be an important partner in efforts to promote education in communities. This finding is particularly relevant in the context of developing

countries where access to education may be limited, and traditional institutions are often deeply embedded in local communities. By leveraging their cultural and social influence, traditional institutions may be able to provide valuable support to education initiatives, such as by promoting attendance, providing financial assistance, and advocating for education policies. Therefore, policymakers and community leaders may wish to consider the role of traditional institutions in promoting education when designing education programs and policies. By partnering with traditional institutions, policymakers may be able to leverage their influence and support to promote education initiatives more effectively. This, in turn, may help to improve access to education and contribute to the development of more educated and informed communities.

Our study also found a positive relationship between traditional institutions and voters' perception, which is consistent with the findings of previous research by Kpessa and Wekwete (2019). This research has demonstrated that traditional authorities can play a vital role in promoting democracy by providing leadership, mediating conflicts, and promoting accountability. Our study adds to this body of research by suggesting that traditional institutions may be an important partner in efforts to promote democratic values and institutions in communities. Traditional institutions are deeply rooted in local cultures and traditions, and they often play a significant role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of community members. As noted by Kpessa and Wekwete (2019), traditional authorities can use their influence and authority to promote democratic values and practices in their communities, such as promoting participation in elections, supporting the rule of law, and promoting human rights. Our findings suggest that traditional institutions may be particularly effective in promoting voters' perception by fostering a sense of trust and legitimacy in the democratic process.

The results of our study have important implications for policymakers and community leaders who are working to promote democratic values and institutions in their communities. By recognizing the importance of traditional institutions in promoting voters' perception, policymakers can work to strengthen and support these institutions, and engage with traditional authorities as key partners in their efforts to promote democracy. This may involve providing resources and support to traditional institutions, as well as working to build relationships and partnerships between traditional authorities and other democratic institutions, such as government agencies and civil society organizations.

Our study found a positive relationship between traditional institutions and voters' trust. This finding is consistent with previous research by Barr and Selman (2016), which suggested that traditional authorities can play a vital role in promoting trust in communities. They found that traditional authorities can promote trust by providing leadership, resolving conflicts, and promoting accountability. This aligns with our results, which suggest that traditional institutions can be an important partner in efforts to promote trust in communities. The positive relationship between traditional institutions and voters' trust is particularly noteworthy in the context of low trust in government and other formal institutions in many countries. According to Rothstein and Stolle (2008), the decline in trust in formal institutions has led to an increased reliance on informal institutions, such as traditional authorities. Our study provides further evidence that traditional institutions can be an important source of trust in communities. Therefore, it is essential to

acknowledge the potential role of traditional institutions in promoting trust and to work with them as partners in efforts to build trust in communities. This approach can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions to address issues related to trust and governance.

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