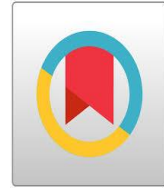


Tradition and Modernity: Leadership struggle for political space in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria



Tradisi dan Modernitas: Perebutan kepemimpinan untuk ruang politik di Wilayah Pemerintah Daerah Warri Selatan, Negara Bagian Delta, Nigeria

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	
<p>Keywords Traditional Institutions; Modernization; Leadership Struggle; Political Space; Cultural Revivalism</p>	<p>ABSTRACT This paper investigates the issue of incorporating traditional rulers into Nigeria's modern local government system with the goal of resolving issues that arise from the interface of tradition and modernity in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. This theoretical paper draws its arguments primarily from secondary sources of data, such as existing legal frameworks and other associated policies, journal publications, and textbooks. This paper shows how traditional leadership institutions strategically used decentralized governance policy reforms to reestablish themselves as the mainstay in grassroots politics. This review is placed within the framework of the debate over the worth of traditional leadership institutions, in the twin processes of democratic transformation and decentralized governance. While the opposing side of the debate dismisses them as mere impediments, the other contends that they are assets that can be used to effectively domesticate reforms, because traditional leaders exhibit ethical principles such as political transparency, accountability, and probity. While research finding showed that traditional leaders possess the capacity to play an advisory role in efforts to institutionalize and customize reforms to the necessities of the community but their poor material circumstances make them unanimously readily available targets for politicians intent on fulfilling their own intended political objectives. The paper thus recommended, among other things, that local government actors and traditional authorities in Warri South Local Government Area should see one another as partners in progress and foster mutual respect and understanding. They must be aware that they cannot function in a watertight compartment and should therefore be cooperative and tolerant.</p>
<p>Kata Kunci Lembaga Tradisional; Modernisasi; Perebutan Kepemimpinan; Ruang Politik; Kebangkitan Budaya;</p>	<p>ABSTRAK Artikel ini meneliti soal penggabungan para pemimpin tradisional ke dalam sistem pemerintahan daerah modern Nigeria dengan tujuan menyelesaikan masalah yang muncul dari hubungan antara tradisi dan modernitas di Wilayah Pemerintah Daerah Warri Selatan, Negara Bagian Delta. Makalah teoritis ini menarik argumennya terutama dari sumber data sekunder, seperti kerangka hukum yang ada dan kebijakan terkait lainnya, publikasi jurnal, dan buku teks. Makalah ini menunjukkan bagaimana lembaga kepemimpinan tradisional secara strategis menggunakan reformasi kebijakan tata kelola yang terdesentralisasi untuk membangun kembali diri mereka sebagai andalan dalam politik akar rumput. Tinjauan ini ditempatkan dalam kerangka perdebatan tentang nilai lembaga kepemimpinan tradisional, dalam proses kembar transformasi demokrasi dan tata kelola yang terdesentralisasi. Sementara pihak yang berseberangan dalam perdebatan tersebut menolaknya sebagai hambatan belaka, pihak lain berpendapat bahwa mereka adalah aset yang dapat digunakan untuk secara efektif menjinakkan reformasi, karena para pemimpin tradisional menunjukkan prinsip-prinsip etika seperti transparansi politik, akuntabilitas, dan kejujuran. Sementara hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para pemimpin adat memiliki kapasitas untuk memainkan peran penasihat dalam upaya melembagakan dan menyesuaikan reformasi dengan kebutuhan masyarakat, tetapi keadaan materi mereka yang buruk membuat mereka dengan suara bulat menjadi sasaran empuk bagi para politisi</p>

	<p><i>yang berniat memenuhi tujuan politik mereka sendiri. Oleh karena itu, makalah ini merekomendasikan, antara lain, bahwa para pelaku pemerintah daerah dan otoritas adat di Wilayah Pemerintah Daerah Warri Selatan harus melihat satu sama lain sebagai mitra dalam kemajuan dan menumbuhkan rasa saling menghormati dan pengertian. Mereka harus menyadari bahwa mereka tidak dapat berfungsi dalam ruang yang kedap air dan karenanya harus kooperatif dan toleran.</i></p>
<p>Article History Send 2th August 2024 Review 31th August 2024 Accepted 9th November 2024</p>	<p>Copyright ©2025 Jurnal Aristo (Social, Politic, Humaniora) This is an open access article under the CC-BY-NC-SA license. Akses artikel terbuka dengan model CC-BY-NC-SA sebagai lisensinya.</p>



Introduction

Local government political operations do not occur in a vacuum. Many actors are drawn into the political arenas of many Sub-Saharan African nations during the decision-making process. Collaboration among key players at the local level is critical for promoting sustainable development and effectively implementing policies and programs; these actors as "stakeholders" because they wield significant control and influence over a wide range of local policies and decision-making. Because of this, strengthening local governance only requires making an effort to identify these stakeholders in each local area. Integration of local stakeholders will improve local governance, unleash local potential, guarantee the effectiveness of policies, and enable the fair distribution of limited resources (Dawda & Dapilah, 2013). Although there are local government structures in Nigeria, much work has been done to identify other stakeholders as agents in bringing government closer to the populace. But lately, there have been more reservations about the participation of stakeholders in local governance. Despite the fact that the right to choose one's representatives is a fundamental and basic human right in modern democracies, these parties may or may not be democratic representatives of the people. Because these stakeholders are not chosen, it is possible that they will act in their own self-interest rather than in the best interests of the public, which is cause for concern. Traditional structures or institutions are one of these stakeholders. In the context of this paper, customary structures are constructed in accordance with pre-existing precedents and traditions (Kwarkye, 2021). Structures based on customs and traditions are referred to as customary structures or institutions.

Decentralization policy reforms have opened up or significantly expanded the political space for maneuver for the gallery of actors involved in the process within the framework of local politics, frequently leading to quite intense struggle over this space. These policy reforms, which are billed as the centerpiece of major policy reforms in Nigeria, have been implemented. These actors, including elected bodies (councils), traditional structures or authorities (traditional leaders or chiefs), local representatives of technical services and ministries, administrative appointees, development committees, and community groups, jostle and wrestle for power, influence, and authority in an effort to establish and legitimize themselves as dominant forces in grassroots politics in the developing new social, political, and economic environment. While a wide range of actors are involved in the conflicts over this newly emerging political space at the local government level, in Delta State's Warri South Local Government Area, the intensity of this struggle has been strikingly pronounced between elected representatives (councilors) and customary authorities (chiefs). Due to the widespread belief

that elected officials and customary authorities are the embodiments of tradition and modernity, these conflicts are typically framed as being between tradition and modernity. However, this development is occurring against the backdrop of a problematic history for traditional authorities. The majority of postcolonial Africa either outlawed traditional leaders or severely limited their authority. For instance, "kill the tribe and build the nation" was the catchphrase used in Mozambique to oppose traditional rulers (Gould, 2001).

Chiefs' intermediary and facilitative roles during the colonization processes are largely to blame for the widespread pattern of dislike of customary authorities in the postcolonial era. Chiefs' authority was "severely undermined and tarnished through indirect rule schemes by the excesses and contradictions that external backing and exigencies of colonial administration produced" (Ribot, 2002). However, it seems as though the current democratization and decentralization waves sweeping the continent of Africa are giving chieftaincy a fresh start. In Ghana, Mozambique, Chad, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, South Africa, Senegal, Zambia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria, traditional leaders appear to have reasserted their dominance. Ironically, central political authorities in some nations are actually doing more to support the resurgence of traditional leaders. In fact, the constitution of South Africa expressly recognizes the existence and right of traditional communities to self-govern under various indigenous legal systems. In a similar vein, the 1992 peace agreement in Mozambique and the 1976 local government reform in Nigeria both include clauses stating that "the government undertakes to respect and not antagonize the traditional structures and authorities where they are currently de facto exercising authority" (Ribot, 2002). Surprisingly, it is now widely believed that the return of traditional leaders is "the panacea for the achievement of decentralized, pluralistic democratic cultures and the strengthening of civil society" (Obario, 2002). They are also idealized as "a romantic category of legitimate popular local leader" (Ribot, 2002).

However, Delta State's local government system is part of Nigeria's unified local government system. The goal of the 1976 local government reform which is effective service delivery has yet to be realized. Poverty persists at the grassroots level in areas such as education, power, health care, and infrastructure. Some of the reasons for this ineffectiveness, and thus poor service delivery, are attributed to conflicts and a lack of cooperation between local government authorities and traditional heads of local communities (Okereka, 2015). Similarly, Ulu et al. (2022) state that the continued occurrence of leadership struggle, open conflict, abject poverty, gross economic backwardness, and total underdevelopment in Delta State's Warri South Local Government Area is a major source of worry and concern among

academics. This paper therefore, examines the leadership struggle for political space in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State.

Method

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative approach as its methodology, aiming for a comprehensive understanding of leadership struggle for political space in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. This study therefore applied secondary sources of data collection. These sources include academic journals, textbooks, and reputable online resources. An in-depth evaluation was performed on the selected secondary sources, extracting key findings and concepts to establish a robust theoretical framework for the study. The research methods also involve the systematic organization and synthesis of the data obtained from these secondary sources to derive meaningful conclusions and identify patterns of leadership struggle for political space in Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State between elected representatives (councilors) and customary authorities (chiefs).

Result and Discussion

Tradition and Modernity

Tradition and modernity are central to the discourse that surrounds local governance and customary structures. The collision of conventions, precedents, and usages, on the one hand, and democratization, technological advancement, and globalization, on the other, frequently shapes the debates. Scholars like Dawda and Dapilah (2013) and Jago (2018) distinguish between what they called "informal and formal social interactions" by drawing a line between tradition and modernity. Customary behavior is based on historical examples, folklore, and social norms that have persisted for a very long time. They are in charge because of precedents that have been passed down through the generations. Usually, leaders of traditional structures make an appeal to long-standing customs to get their commands carried out. The reason the commands are followed is not always because the person has the power to carry them out, but rather because of their status in society. Traditional practices, on the other hand, are in opposition to modern ones. Authority from the central government, which typically has roots in colonial governments, distinguishes modern structures from "traditional" ones. Production, distribution, reproduction, objectivity, and rationality functions all influence the structure of the modern world. Modern structures choose their leaders based on popular and periodic elections or, occasionally, bureaucratic procedures, and tactics rather than appealing to centuries-old customs and traditions (Edel & Josua, 2018).

Legal procedures that specify the current relationship between those exercising power and those it is exercised upon occasionally lay out the source of legitimate power of formal structures. Although the distinction between tradition and modernity is clear in theory, it is still hazy in practice, especially in Delta State's Warri South Local Government Area. This paper contributes to the debates about tradition and modernity by arguing that every structure in the Warri South Local Government has features that combine traits of both tradition and modernity. In this study, the term "customary institutions" refers to a blend of tradition and innovation that is influenced by current globalization trends. While traditional structures continue to serve as the people's inherited representatives, they are also evolving in response to the current wave of globalization and democratization by incorporating accountability, transparency, responsibility, and other democratic values. Traditional structures have been changing their positions to incorporate democratic values in order to maintain their position as cultural leaders in their respective areas of jurisdiction as well as their status as important partners in local governance.

The intersection of tradition and modernity has been a major theme in postcolonial African philosophy. African philosophers have explored this subject from a variety of perspectives, but two issues have come to the forefront of ongoing discussion. The first has to do with the applicability of traditional African institutions to the difficulties of the modern democratic process. The issue is whether traditional ways of thinking, acting, and institutions are assets or barriers to Africa's development and modernization. They argued that colonialism violently destroyed African cultural traditions and attempted to impose European ways of thinking and social organization on colonized peoples, with varying degrees of success (Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013). Postcolonial Africans must now work toward a more definite liberation, the decolonization of African societies and minds, having achieved political independence. The revivalists are frequently doubtful of calls for advancement and modernization, seeing them as thinly veiled calls for the endured the implementation of European cultural standards, but it is pertinent to note that they do not typically regard their own project as anti-modern. The key point for revivalists is that genuine African modernization can only be recognized through the resurgence of African customs and traditions.

Traditional Rulers and Chiefs in Nigeria

The age-old traditional institution has not changed with the passage of time. This institution provided an administration system from which order and law emerged, as well as a stable system of oversight. It is important to note that most Western scholars believed that pre-

colonial African societies lacked a system of administration: no law, no order, no governing body, and no civilization. This belief has long been regarded as not only incorrect but also highly personalized (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2015). Traditional African societies were known to have well-organized and well-established systems of administration where order in the community was guaranteed and maintained, laws were made and implemented, and inter-communal and intertribal disputes were resolved. This demonstrates that traditional institutions remain an important feature of the people, commanding a high level of respect and devotion among them. Traditional rulers, it is widely assumed, have no significance in a democratic system in which only the elected can rule. Traditional rulers' legitimacy is not widely accepted because of their method of ascension to power.

The preceding argument raises two fundamental issues. First and foremost, in an impoverished nation like Nigeria, where traditional institutions still wield considerable power over the people they represent, can their opinion be completely ignored? This question becomes more pressing when representatives who were elected at all various levels of government are questioned about the impact they have during election times (Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013), despite the fact that traditional rulers are reputed to be apolitical. The second question concerns the fundamental liberties of traditional position holders. Do they have a right to express themselves as citizens? The voice in the awareness of being able to participate in the electoral system without facing allegations of political affiliation, which would damage the widely held belief that they are the founding fathers to all. Tonwe and Osemwota (2013) also argue that the ancient monarchy served as the basis of government. One striking reality is that none of these ancient rulers ever exercised authority over the entire stretch of territory of modern Nigeria; rather, their geographic areas of affect were largely localized. Because of this historical context, there has been a tendency to view and analyze developments in traditional institutions in the country in relation to local government rather than the country's governmental system as a whole. Traditional rulers' roles in local government administration have evolved over time. They are now advisers in the modern local government system, having previously served as the leaders of their municipalities. This has strained relations between ancient rulers and appointed local government officials. However, who exactly are chiefs? Chiefs, where they existed, were the undisputed heads of their people in the pre-colonial system. They played significant roles in the colonial scheme, particularly in the North, according to Dore (2011), however at the whims of the administration of the colony. Chiefs' political sway even persisted during the period of independence until it was finally eliminated with the adoption of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's new constitution in 1979.

Leadership Struggle for Political Space in Warri South Local Government Area

For decades, the question of "ownership" of Warri and Warri South Local Government has been a source of contention in Nigerian courts and media, as well as among Warri residents. It is the central argument in the various ethnic groups' presentations of the root causes of the violent disputes and crises in Warri. Closely related to the issue of "ownership" is the issue of representation in formal government structures, both at the local and state levels. Delta State, along with several others, was established in 1991 by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's military regime. The dominant power structures in all three Warri local government areas (LGAs), Warri North, Warri South, and Warri South West, are seen as unfair by both Ijaw and Urhobo. They claim that because of this dominance, the Itsekiri and their ancestral leader, the Olu of Warri (a disputed title since it was changed from the Olu of Itsekiri in 1952), receive an unfair advantage when it comes to government resources, such as contracts and appointments as well as, for instance, acquiring "certificates of origin" to qualify for government scholarships for higher education. Control over government institutions also has other advantages; chief among them increased contact with the oil industry and the potential for lucrative contract awards. The establishment of new wards and local government areas is one of the demands of the Ijaw and Urhobo, who feel that doing so would ensure that their ethnic teams are more adequately represented (Ulu et al., 2022). In order to maintain their status as the cultural leaders of their specific regions of jurisdiction as well as dependable collaborators in Warri South Local Government, traditional institutions were changing their stances to incorporate democratic values. Struggle for Political Space in Warri South Local Government Area constitute the remote cause of conflict in Warri today.

Particularly in contrast to the enviable place they occupied throughout the pre and colonial era, traditional institutions are being demoted to obscurity in contemporary times in terms of governance. In spite of playing what appears to be a key role in governance, traditional institutions do not have constitutional recognition or obligations (Ehrhardt, 2023). In contrast to the colonial and military-imposed political structures from the colonial era and the post-independence period, respectively, what has occurred to the customary chieftaincy institutions in modern Nigeria is simply an indication of our inability to design an appropriate political system that will take into account our social, economic, and political realities. Although it is a given that traditional institutions are very important to governance, there has been a great deal of criticism of these institutions. The majority of these criticisms center on the colonial era's dishonorable use of traditional positions.

Traditional institutions, however, have the potential to aid in the democratization of Africa due to the nature of their fundamental political values. The potential to contribute to the democratic evolution of the continent would likely increase their traditional political values and democratic principles converge in their execution (Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013). Given the diversity of African traditional institutions, it is always dangerous to make generalizations about them. Decentralization of power, respect for dissent, safeguarding minority views and interests through the requirement of consensus on decisions, direct participation in decision-making, closing the gap among the rulers and the ruled by the active participation of all adult males in creating and enforcing rules, and equitable distribution of power are among the most prevalent political values and practices in decentralized political systems. These beliefs directly refute assertions that political culture in rural African societies tends to be vertically organized. Decentralized systems are not the only ones that employ these techniques. In the majority of chieftaincy systems, the majority of these values are deeply ingrained among the populace (Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013). They are therefore African political values as opposed to political values that are restricted to a particular kind of political system. It is hotly contested whether traditional leadership is either complementary or antagonistic with democracy and decentralization. There are essentially two schools of thought in this argument. Traditional institutions are seen by the first school of thought as being incompatible with democracy and decentralization, whereas the second school of thought supports some form of coexistence because traditional leadership institutions are a significant part of local communities' historical heritage and cannot simply be wished away.

The detractors of traditional leadership institutions contend that traditional authority is anachronistic and shouldn't even be present in the twenty-first century. Thus, traditional leaders are seen as the remains of a rapidly disappearing era. As a result, traditional institutions are viewed as wholly incapable of advancing, particularly in areas like political organization, women's rights, social mobility, and financial freedom (Ehrhardt, 2023). The argument that choosing one's representatives is an essential and basic human right in modern democracies is used to further criticize traditional institutions as being undemocratic. Chieftaincy is essentially "a caste whereby only birth members are eligible to assume the position of Chiefs" (Ribot 2002), which explains why this is the case. In South Africa, a traditional leader expresses these feelings even more succinctly. "Traditional leaders such as myself rise to power by means of birthright; my biological father was a king, and I am his heir", he observes. On the other hand, elected officials receive their power through popular balloting (Molotlegi, 2002:1).

Therefore, the problem is that chieftaincy is inherently undemocratic as long as it relies on heredity and ascription. Rural residents are automatically denied the freedom to decide which institutions or people should be in charge. The main issue is that ascription-based chieftaincy makes leaders hardly responsible to their subjects, and as a result, empowering or collaborating with them could fail to achieve the efficiency, equity, or development goals so frequently strongly idealized by somewhat ignorant decentralized governance advocates (Ribot 2002; Ehrhardt, 2023). The claim is that cooperating with or giving chiefs power merely amounts to maintaining the isolation of people within communities by giving administratively motivated local decision-makers the authority to speak on behalf of the populace (Mamdani, 1996). The defining principle of this school of thought is that because traditional and modern kinds of leadership derive their legal standing from two different sources, they cannot coexist. While the modern African state is a creation of and a successor to the imposed colonial state, traditional rulers derive their entitlements to legitimacy, authority, and even supremacy from their pre-colonial roots.

The defenders of traditional leadership institutions, on the other hand, argue that these organizations cannot simply be legislated out of existence or reduced to existing only in a traditional social setting separate from the contemporary civil society (Senyonjo 2004; Stacey 2016; Kwarkye 2021). This school of thought's main thesis is the fact that traditional leadership institutions remain immobile and frozen in time. It is asserted that because traditional leaders do not exist in a vacuum, they develop and adapt to the shifting values and desires of their people. This is true of all facets of culture and tradition. The average person shapes and conditions it to continually be relevant. The nature and operation of the institution of traditional leaders in contemporary society are influenced by the principles of democracy, participation, and reverence for human rights, reciprocity, and cooperation with others (Stacey, 2016).

Ehrhardt (2017), for example, claims that it is crucial to comprehend how chieftainship is based on traditional village institutions that include societal norms and concepts about leadership in order to fully grasp its relevance. According to their argument, a ruler's subjects are completely conscious of the obligations he has toward them as well as the obligations they have toward him, and they have the power to put pressure on him to fulfill these obligations. Baldwin (2015) claims that in some circumstances, a chief may actually be relieved of his chieftaincy by popular vote if his behavior is not consistent with what is typical of a chief and what the office entails. In this sense, the chief's subjects hold the bulk of the power, and should a chief fail to act or lead in accordance with their expectations, his or her subjects has the authority to demand their removal. Therefore, chieftaincy is frequently seen as embodying the

virtues regarding political integrity, openness, service, and probity. It is also claimed that traditional leaders are extremely important to their subjects' quality of life because they encourage and inspire them to pursue development in all spheres, promote teamwork, and extol the importance of everyone in a community being fully committed to and involved in establishing and carrying out policies for the welfare of the entire community. They are able to accomplish these goals because people highly value their word, appreciate their praise, and model behavior after them. Ehrhardt (2023) actually makes the case that the institution of traditional leaders, which is an integral part of African people's cultural heritage, is a crucial component of their fundamental right to culture. It cannot, therefore, be established out of existence just because it is indistinguishable with decentralization and democratization once the people who will be negatively impacted by it decide on their own to have it.

According to this school of thought, traditional norms, values, and practices may be crucial in cultivating the simultaneous processes of democratic transformation and decentralization. It does this by drawing on the apparent adaptability of customary authorities. It is argued that any effort to facilitate the interface among tradition, democratization, and decentralization should take as a starting point the fact that traditional institutions and leadership cannot be curtailed or even eliminated without losing their significance in the eyes of the grassroots. This viewpoint leads to the conclusion that cultivating democracy entails "a dynamic and constantly process of institutionalization in which democratic ideals, practices, actions, beliefs, and relationships, and new forms of political behavior gain consent as well as widespread support in society and become effectively incorporated with various elements of culture and society endowing them with popular legitimacy" (Igwubor, 2020).

Therefore, proponents of this school of thought contend that traditional institutions offer a mechanism for the adaptation of new ideas through comparison and contrast with already established ones. In this sense, traditional institutions serve as the cornerstone upon which new ideas are constructed, and this foundation not only helps people understand new ideas but also allows them to be incorporated into their body the political system without losing the fundamental components of their cultural heritage (Kwarkye, 2021). As a result, it is argued that the courage, honesty, and creative thinking with which the intersection between tradition, democratization, and decentralization is dealt with is crucial to any optimism of achieving long-term democratization and decentralization (Senyonjo 2004). The crucial point is that "political forms influenced by African representations should be complemented with the western models of governance" (Obario 2002), as "to neglect or undermine traditional institutions could oppose the people and perhaps even legitimize their opposition" (Senyonjo 2004).

Traditional institutions should be regarded as distinct actors who can take part in any type of development project because they are active stakeholders. As a result, they are unrestricted in developing their own policies and programs, independent of the Warri South Local Government. However, if consultation is required, you should get in touch with them and get their thoughts. Additionally, when allocating lands, raising money and resolving disputes, the traditional institutions should seek the advice of chairman and councilors of the Warri South Local Government's counsel. This kind of partnership will eventually benefit both in the long run. These types of partnerships strengthen local actors so they can maximize their effect on the development agenda. These advantages include using native institutions for local governance and letting customary structures act as development and service delivery agents in their respective right. This type of collaboration avoids the difficulty of the frequently contentious and complicated fusion of traditional authorities into local government. Traditional institutions in the Warri South Local Government Area are allowed to act independently within the institutional framework by taking part in any form of development on their own initiative and only consulting local government units or vice versa as necessary.

Conclusion

The most intriguing conclusion of this study, however, is that customary authorities are seen as much more legitimate agents of growth and change in rural communities than local government leaders and Council members. The justifications given in this regard consisted of the fact that customary authorities own the villages and live there alongside the villagers, so they are fully aware of their problems. Customary authorities are widely recognized as the primary partisan administrative unit at the level of the community because they are, in contrast to Chairmen and Councilors, easily accessible when the residents have problems. They oversee activities like resolution of disputes, reigns over various ceremonies, prevent crimes, decide on community development initiatives, maintain population registers, and are crucial to the moral uplift of society. As a result, they are widely regarded as the guardians of regional customs, culture, and even the land. The chiefs are the ones who ultimately decide how people can access and use the land. Thus, chiefs were frequently referred to as the actual community leaders. In stark contrast, traditional leaders were consistently seen as having more influence than councilors in Warri South Local Government because they are able to accomplish more on their own and respond to people more than anyone else.

From the perspective of the grassroots, traditional leaders are seen as far more legitimate, which is largely due to the fact that agriculture is the foundation of their livelihoods.

Land is the essential resource in this way of life, and only traditional leaders have control over its use and access. Because doing so could undermine the very foundation of their livelihoods, the majority of people would not be able to afford to aggravate their relationships with the chiefs. Furthermore, traditional leaders frequently portray themselves as the living embodiment of a shared heritage, identity, and feeling of belonging for the people through their authority over land. This is frequently stated in terms of their positions' longevity as opposed to councilors' and other elected leadership positions', whose holders of power come and go. Therefore, the sense of enduring rooted in the shared heritage, identity, and belongingness cultivates a climate of pervasive trust in traditional leaders among the grassroots, which is further supported by their central role in their economic survival in terms of access to the essential productive asset land.

The widespread contend in the Warri South Local Government Area between councilors and customary authorities shows how the alignment of decentralized powers with those already exercised locally can affect the level or type of decentralization. This is what supports the idea that decentralized governance does not occur in a vacuum. As a result, what might appear to be decentralization from the center could actually end up being a centralizing force when it transfers power that was previously exercised locally to a new or even different set of institutions? This is exactly what happened with councilors taking on a decision-making role on grassroots development projects, a role that had previously been more or less assumed to belong to customary authorities for years. This study's demonstration of the apparent importance of customary authorities to the populace is one reason for the implied close connection between the culture and politics. The case for using this relationship as the starting point for any efforts aimed at cultivating the twin processes of decentralized and democratized is therefore compelling, especially in light of the historically high level of resiliency traditional institutions have displayed in the face of attempts to either suppress them or abolish them entirely. The difficulty for customary authorities, however, in effectively serving as a midwife in the efforts to institutionalize and modify these processes to the demands of local circumstances is their precarious material situation, which makes them easy prey for politicians looking to advance their own tactical objectives, such as strengthening upward instead of the downward structure of responsibility that has become the hallmark of democratic transformation and decentralized governance. Determining the effects of decentralization therefore necessitates a thorough understanding of the actors that are emerging, receiving support, and gaining influence leading to political landscape, as well as their connections to both the central government and the local populace.

The fundamental claim of this paper is that traditional leaders' poor material circumstances make them unanimously readily available targets for politicians determined to satisfy their own intended political considerations, entrenching the uprising. This is despite the fact that the fundamental thrust of the findings upon which this paper relies shows that traditional leaders possess the capacity to perform a midwife role in the attempts of domesticating and modify the reforms to the necessities of local conditions. Determining the effects of decentralized administration policy reforms therefore necessitates a thorough comprehension of the actors emerging, receiving support, and gaining influence in the leading political landscape, as well as their connections to both the central government and the local populace. The main issue, however, is that the various logics of local politics, which almost always adopt a rhythm of their own, do not neatly fit in with the legal and relevant logics of reform processes. The following suggestions were made based on the fascinating finding of this paper: a). Local government actors and traditional authorities in Warri South Local Government Area should see one another as partners in progress and foster mutual respect and understanding. They must be aware that they cannot function in a watertight compartment and should therefore be cooperative and tolerant. b). Because traditional rulers are close to the people on the street and the traditional chieftaincy institution is an unwavering part of Nigeria's polity, customary or traditional rulers should be given the opportunity to nominate some of their experienced subservient chiefs to serve as constituent members of customary courts or councilors in Warri South Local Government Council. c). Traditional rulers in Nigeria continue to enjoy a high degree of public legitimacy. The institution still needs to be incorporated into the contemporary local government structure of the nation. If economic and political growth was based on broadly accepted institutions and cultural norms portrayed by traditional authorities, it would be more successful. In addition to their other ceremonial duties, traditional rulers' involvement in local government matters would lessen potential animosity and disagreement between local government actors and traditional authorities in Warri South Local Government Area.

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