

THE ROLES OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A STUDY OF LAND RELATED DISPUTES IN KONTAGORA EMIRATE, NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the roles of traditional political institutions in the resolution of land-related disputes in Kontagora Emirate, Niger State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the persistence of land conflicts and the growing interest in indigenous mechanisms of conflict management despite the limited constitutional roles assigned to traditional institutions in contemporary governance. Anchored on New Institutional Theory, the study adopted a qualitative case study design. Data were generated through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including emirate officials, traditional title holders, district heads, village heads, security personnel, vigilante representatives, and experts. The data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that traditional political institutions remain central to land dispute resolution in Kontagora Emirate. Their major roles include maintaining peace and stability, serving as custodians of land, receiving and mediating complaints, providing advisory services to government, and collaborating with formal security and judicial institutions. The study found that community members exhibit high levels of trust and confidence in traditional institutions due to their accessibility, cultural legitimacy, reliance on reconciliation, and deep knowledge of local history, customs, and land ownership patterns. The hierarchical structure of authority—from ward heads to the Emirate Council—facilitates effective dispute management and provides avenues for appeal and review. The findings also indicate strong collaboration between traditional authorities, courts, police, and local government institutions, resulting in a complementary system of conflict resolution. The study concludes that traditional political institutions remain indispensable mechanisms for resolving land disputes and sustaining social harmony in Kontagora Emirate. Their effectiveness is strengthened by community legitimacy, institutional adaptability, and constructive engagement with formal governance structures. The study recommends greater institutional support, legal recognition, and integration of traditional institutions into broader conflict resolution and land governance frameworks to enhance sustainable peace and social stability.

Keywords: Traditional political institutions, conflict resolution, land disputes, traditional rulers, customary governance, Kontagora Emirate,