

# Integrating Traditional Authority into Electoral Governance: Lessons from the Bida Emirate Experience, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*Traditional authority remains a central component of governance and policy mediation across Africa, where culturally grounded legitimacy often complements formal state institutions. This study examines how traditional institutions contribute to electoral governance through the case of the 2023 general elections in the Bida Emirate, Niger State, Nigeria. Guided by Hybrid Governance Theory and Institutional Pluralism, the research explores how indigenous authority structures interact with formal institutions to promote democratic legitimacy, peace, and civic participation. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 299 respondents and analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics, including the Chi-square test. The analysis reveals that traditional leaders in the Bida Emirate played significant roles in electoral peacebuilding through dialogue, community sensitization, and collaboration with security agencies. Findings highlight how traditional legitimacy complements formal electoral institutions by fostering trust, moral authority, and compliance with peaceful conduct during elections. The study contributes to the policy integration of traditional institutions by demonstrating that hybrid governance can enhance electoral credibility and conflict prevention in plural political environments. It recommends that electoral management bodies institutionalize structured consultations with traditional councils as part of election planning, voter education, and dispute resolution mechanisms. In doing so, African electoral systems can strengthen democratic legitimacy by embedding indigenous authority within the architecture of public administration and governance reform.*

## Introduction

How may non-state governance forms help to ensure democratic accountability and successful service delivery? This challenge is particularly important in developing democracies because state institutions fail to meet expectations of openness, responsiveness, and inclusivity. Traditional institutions, based on pre-colonial and colonial legacies, are still firmly established in community life throughout Africa. They frequently function as cultural custodians, social integration agents, and informal governance mediators. Recent research has found that traditional rulers offer local security, encourage community engagement, and sustain legitimacy in locations where official state power is restricted (Mlambo, 2022; Osei & Ackah, 2023). Similarly, Dlakavu and Mahlalela (2024) argue that traditional authority continues to play an important role in Africa's hybrid governance systems, complementing formal administrative institutions with moral legitimacy and closeness to residents.

In many post-colonial African republics, traditional authority coexists with official institutions, creating what Ekeh (2002) refers to as a "dual authority system." Under this model, state agencies retain legal authority, but traditional leaders wield power over participation, social cohesion, and conflict resolution. These leaders frequently interpret and tailor state policies to local circumstances, bridging the gap between bureaucratic governance and experienced community realities (Mamdani, 2021; Dube & Mutasa, 2024). However, their function in electoral governance and public administration is little understood and underutilized in policy frameworks (Arowolo, 2023).

Nigeria provides a fascinating setting for investigating this interaction. With its ethnic variety and unequal institutional reach, the country still relies on traditional rulers for dispute resolution, political education, and community mobilization (Adeola & Adedeji, 2023). Several traditional elders in northern Nigeria actively advocated voter confidence and peaceful participation in the general elections of 2023. In Kwara State, for example, traditional institutions had a substantial impact in shaping voter behavior and discouraging election violence (Jimoh, 2023). Similarly, the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA), in collaboration with UN Women, established measures to promote women's political participation and avoid gender-based electoral violence (United Nations Nigeria, 2023). These efforts were successful in increasing voter turnout and promoting peaceful elections in the region.

Within this larger national context, the Bida Emirate, led by His Royal Highness Dr. Yahaya Abubakar and Etsu Nupe, illustrates traditional institutions' stabilizing ability. According to Abdulmalik and Mustapha (2020), the Emirate's long-standing social structure and historical legitimacy support its role in promoting peace and civic engagement. During the 2023 elections, the Etsu Nupe organized intercommunal meetings with political, religious, and youth leaders to encourage tolerance, mutual respect, and acceptance of electoral results (Daily Trust, 2023). These approaches demonstrate the effectiveness of indigenous

government in maintaining peace through moral authority and culturally based legitimacy.

Despite these efforts, the incorporation of traditional power into formal electoral government remains conceptually and institutionally constrained. Much of the research on democratic accountability continues to focus on formal institutions like electoral commissions, courts, and political parties, while ignoring the informal processes that moderate citizen behavior and legitimacy (Ajayi & Ojo, 2020; Akinyemi, 2024). This divide impedes the creation of hybrid governance models that may connect procedural democracy with culturally rooted systems of authority. According to Adeyemo (2023), public administration in Africa requires more conceptual flexibility to represent the continent's diverse governance realities.

The Bida Emirate experience provides a factual basis for developing a contextualized policy framework that integrates traditional authority within Nigeria's democratic system. This integration demonstrates how cultural legitimacy can enhance election credibility, increase citizen participation, and improve service delivery—critical components of contemporary public administration. While previous discussions have focused primarily on traditional leadership's role in dispute resolution, this study expands the scope by examining the Emirate's involvement in the 2023 elections to understand how traditional institutions contribute to democratic accountability amid evolving political dynamics.

This study proposes the following research question: “To what extent do traditional institutions influence the prevention of election-related violence in the Bida Emirate during the 2023 elections?”. Accordingly, the hypothesis is:

H<sub>01</sub>: Traditional institutions have no significant involvement in preventing election-related violence in the Bida Emirate during the 2023 elections.

H<sub>11</sub>: Traditional institutions have significant involvement in preventing election-related violence in the Bida Emirate during the 2023 elections.

## Literature Review

### *Traditional Authority and Governance Systems*

Traditional authority continues to be an important component of administration in most African communities, coexisting with contemporary state institutions under what Ekeh (2002) refers to as the "two publics." This dual system consists of two parts: the civic public, which is tied to the state and formal law, and the primal public, which is based on kinship, culture, and communal duties. The interplay of various publics frequently influences the governance environment in Sub-Saharan Africa. Tonwe and Osemavota (2020) define traditional institutions as organized systems of indigenous government that provide moral validity, social identity, and administrative continuity. In Nigeria, these institutions are often established under hereditary monarchs with hierarchical administrative frameworks to maintain social order and authority continuity (Emordi & Osiki, 2021). These traditional institutions play a significant role in local governance and

decision-making processes, often working alongside formal legal systems. They serve as important channels for resolving disputes, maintaining social cohesion, and preserving cultural heritage in the region.

Across Africa, traditional authority serves comparable stabilizing and integrative functions. In Ghana, chieftaincy institutions remain acknowledged participants in government, notably in conflict resolution and local development (Boafo-Arthur, 2021). Botswana's kgotla system promotes interactive interaction between chiefs and civilians, representing a historically ingrained paradigm of inclusive government (Lekorwe, 2022). Similarly, in Kenya, traditional elders have resurfaced as mediators in election and land issues, frequently commanding greater confidence than elected authorities (Oloo & Njoroge, 2023). These examples demonstrate the endurance of indigenous government as a legitimizing factor in Africa's changing democratic systems.

Hyden's (1983) concept of the "economy of affection" provides further context for these processes, emphasizing how networks of personal trust and moral duty maintain authority and collective action in African political institutions. Traditional monarchs that operate within such emotive networks get legitimacy from reciprocal ties with their subjects, as well as ancestry. This social embeddedness explains their persistence and ongoing significance in nations marked by bureaucratic instability and unequal institutional reach (Dube & Mutasa, 2024). In this way, traditional monarchs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between formal governance structures and grassroots communities. By leveraging personal relationships and cultural traditions, they can navigate the complexities of modern political systems while maintaining a sense of continuity and stability for their people.

### *Traditional Institutions in Policy Implementation*

Traditional institutions also have a practical role in policy implementation, especially in places where formal state capability is limited. They frequently serve as liaisons between government departments and local communities, promoting communication, mobilization, and compliance. According to Arowolo (2023), traditional leaders in Nigeria have played an important role in the implementation of public health programs, educational initiatives, and agricultural changes by mobilizing community confidence. Similarly, in Ghana, chiefs have participated in decentralized administration by aiding with land management and local taxes (Asante & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2021). These traditional leaders often have deep-rooted connections within their communities, allowing them to effectively disseminate information and enforce policies. Their involvement in governance could help bridge the gap between formal institutions and local populations, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of public programs and initiatives.

In Kenya, traditional councils have aided rural development and environmental management initiatives by leveraging traditional traditions to achieve modern policy objectives (Mwangi, 2024). Botswana's inclusion of the House of Chiefs within its formal legislative framework serves as an institutional paradigm for incorporating traditional authority into state policy creation (Lekorwe, 2022). Despite these instances, integration is generally ad hoc rather than

methodical. Formal institutions seldom provide organized pathways for collaboration, and policy frameworks rarely acknowledge traditional players' informal authority in governance outcomes (Adeyemo, 2023). As a result, there is often a disconnect between traditional practices and modern policy implementation, leading to potential inefficiencies and conflicts.

The Bida Emirate in Nigeria demonstrates how such collaborative governance might arise spontaneously. During the 2023 general elections, the Emirate worked with governmental institutions, security forces, and community organizations to encourage peaceful participation and civic tolerance. This highlights the possibility for "hybrid governance," in which traditional and formal institutions collaborate on policy delivery and dispute resolution (Akinyemi, 2024). However, these hybrid systems rely significantly on mutual respect and well-defined jurisdictional borders, which are frequently absent in practice.

### *Electoral Governance and Institutional Legitimacy*

Elections remain the primary instrument for democratic legitimacy and accountability. However, many African democracies' electoral procedures are regularly tainted by violence, mistrust, and manipulation. Robert and Edward (2019) characterize elections as vehicles for popular engagement in leadership selection, but in practice, this process is susceptible to pressure and elite takeover. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES, 2020) describes electoral violence as a widespread threat to democracy, comprising both physical and psychological harm to participants and institutions.

Recent research expands on this concept to include indirect involvement, such as misinformation, intimidation, and manipulation of electoral logistics (Tacham & Acho, 2024). These interactions highlight the fragility of institutional legitimacy in transitional democracies. Birch and Muchlinski (2023) underline that institutional legitimacy is dependent not just on procedural integrity but also on moral authority, an area in which traditional leaders frequently excel.

Traditional authority, with its cultural legitimacy, can thereby strengthen electoral trust and stability. Chiefs and emirs in northern Nigeria have always mediated political tensions and prevented violence during elections (Jimoh, 2023). The Bida Emirate's engagement in peace advocacy during the 2023 elections is consistent with wider regional trends in which traditional leaders support official institutions by encouraging moderation, dialogue, and acceptance of decisions (United Nations Nigeria, 2023). Such behaviors are consistent with Gaventa and Valderrama's (2020) claim that participatory governance necessitates intermediaries who transform governmental power into socially credible modes of interaction.

### *Gaps in Integrating Indigenous Institutions into Public Policy*

Despite their importance, traditional authorities are underrepresented in formal governance structures. Africa's public administration philosophy has generally grown within Western institutional frameworks, with an emphasis on bureaucratic rationality above cultural validity (Mlambo, 2022). As a result, indigenous institutions are frequently viewed as historical relics rather than active

participants in contemporary administration. In Nigeria, traditional rulers are seldom given official responsibilities in election monitoring, service delivery, or local development coordination (Adeola & Adedeji, 2023). This exclusion perpetuates a disconnect between the government and the grassroots level, hindering effective governance and development outcomes.

This negligence creates a gap between the formal state and the moral society it pretends to represent. As Hyden (1983) and Ekeh (2002) noted, this dualism fosters government inefficiency by causing individuals to swing between devotion to state institutions and allegiance to traditional leaders. Dlakavu and Mahlalela (2024) argue that a lack of structured collaboration affects democratic accountability and policy efficacy. The dichotomy between legitimacy and legality, between moral trust and procedural authority, remains central to Africa's governance enigma.

To address this gap, public management must be rethought in hybrid terms. The co-production of government by formal and traditional institutions, as shown in the Bida Emirate, indicates the viability of multiple governance systems that balance local legitimacy with administrative efficiency. Including traditional authority in election strategy may increase confidence, inclusion, and accountability, providing a form of adaptive governance appropriate for non-Western democracies.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study adopts Hybrid Governance Theory, Institutional Pluralism, and the Indigenization of Public Administration as its theoretical framework to explain how traditional authority can be integrated into Nigeria's electoral governance architecture. These frameworks collectively illuminate the complex interactions between state and non-state actors in the co-production of democratic legitimacy, accountability, and service delivery within plural political environments such as Nigeria.

Hybrid governance theory serves as the key analytical lens for this work. It underlines the existence of both formal state institutions and informal authority structures that share governance tasks within a single political order (Boege et al., 2009; Meagher, 2021). Hybrid governance is especially important in circumstances where state capability varies and legitimacy is co-constructed by elected officials and traditional leaders. Within Nigeria's electoral governance system, traditional authorities such as the Etsu Nupe in the Bida Emirate demonstrate how indigenous institutions may mediate political conflicts, foster civic trust, and improve election compliance. Their efforts frequently bridge the gap between bureaucratic institutions and local communities, supporting democratic values through culturally based techniques of persuasion and consensus-building.

Institutional pluralism adds to this approach by acknowledging the concurrent functioning of many systems of authority, norms, and legitimacy within African government institutions (Olivier de Sardan, 2021; Lund, 2020). Rather than dismissing traditional institutions as outmoded or informal, institutional pluralism asserts that they survive and interact dynamically with legal systems. In the instance

of the Bida Emirate, the council works with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and security authorities to promote civic education, conflict resolution, and community mobilization. This layered governance model demonstrates how institutional diversity improves the inclusiveness and legitimacy of election processes, particularly in situations when official institutions struggle to gain grassroots trust.

The Indigenization of Public Administration approach establishes a normative framework for contextualizing these interactions within Africa's sociopolitical circumstances. It questions the dominance of Western administrative paradigms and calls for the adoption of governance models that reflect indigenous values, leadership structures, and decision-making traditions (Adamolekun, 2020; Olowu, 2019). This study supports the indigenization concept by including the Bida Emirate as an institutional player in election governance, demonstrating how moral authority, familial networks, and communal ethics may promote democratic accountability and institutional legitimacy.

These theoretical views, taken together, form a multifaceted framework for examining the integration of traditional authority with electoral administration. The study deviates from traditional peacebuilding rhetoric by stressing co-production of governance, shared legitimacy, and contextualized policy design. It advances public administration theory by arguing that efficient democratic government in Nigeria necessitates an adaptable institutional structure that acknowledges both state and traditional systems of power. The Bida Emirate experience therefore provides important lessons for rethinking election governance using culturally relevant and inclusive institutional forms.

## Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive survey approach to investigate the link between traditional authority and electoral governance in the Bida Emirate. This approach was chosen because it is well-suited to researching societal views, legitimacy, and institutional behavior in complicated governance environments. A descriptive survey collects systematic data from a broad and varied population over a short period of time, allowing for quantitative study of trends that impact citizens' opinions about conventional institutions and election processes.

The approach is consistent with the study's policy-oriented goal of not just discovering statistical connections but also providing empirical insights useful for policy formation. By collecting community opinions of trust, legitimacy, and institutional performance, the survey provides a solid foundation for creating adaptable electoral governance frameworks that incorporate traditional authority into democratic administration.

The study was carried out in Niger State's Bida Emirate, which is located in Nigeria's North Central. The Emirate is mostly inhabited by the Nupe ethnic group and serves as one of Nigeria's most historically significant traditional government hubs. Bida, founded in the nineteenth century by Etsu Usman Zaki following the

Sokoto Jihad's push into central Nigeria, grew into a bustling political and economic city famed for craftsmanship in brass, glass, weaving, and leather (Ndagi, 2020). Alhaji Yahaya Abubakar, the current Etsu Nupe, has governed since 2003 and continues to promote peace, education, and civic harmony (Ahmed, 2019). The Emirate's historical continuity and sociopolitical impact make it an ideal location for studying hybrid governance techniques in election circumstances.

The population of Bida Local Government Area (LGA) is estimated to be 318,300 people (Niger State Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Using Taro Yamane's (1967) technique for sample size determination with a 5% margin of error, the study obtained a sample of 399 respondents. This sample size is statistically sufficient to assure representativeness and reliability in evaluating the link between conventional institutions and election outcomes.

A stratified random sampling procedure was used to guarantee proportional representation across Bida LGA's wards and communities. Each stratum was distinguished by social and administrative differences that reflect various interactions between traditional authority and electoral administration. To reduce bias and guarantee inclusion, respondents were picked at random within each stratum. This technique enables the study to capture the wide range of experiences that impact government legitimacy and public confidence in both traditional and state institutions.

The study utilized both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected using a standardized questionnaire delivered by experienced study assistants. The questionnaire was created to obtain feedback on traditional rulers' perceived legitimacy, authority, and policy relevance during the 2023 general elections. To guarantee cultural sensitivity and comprehension, the questionnaire was pretested in Bida with a pilot group before being fully deployed. Secondary data were gathered from scholarly papers, policy reports, and institutional records to give context and theoretical support.

Quantitative data were evaluated using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to characterize respondents' perspectives. Inferential analysis was performed using the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test in SPSS (Version 23). This allowed us to explore theories on the relationship between traditional authority and electoral governance results, particularly in terms of lowering election-related tensions. The analytical approach goes beyond numerical association to investigate how traditional rulers' perceived legitimacy transfers into real policy actions and institutional collaboration during elections.

The Edusoko University Bida Research and Ethics Committee provided ethical permission for this work. Participants gave informed permission after being told about the study's aim, confidentiality measures, and the ability to withdraw at any time. Local norms, cultural hierarchies, and political sensitivities were all considered when developing the study tools.

Recognizing the hierarchical character of conventional administration, the research design included reflexivity to help offset possible biases caused by societal deference to authoritative persons. Local intermediaries who are familiar with community systems were hired to foster trust and transparency throughout data collection. The investigation also looked at how cultural values of respect and allegiance can influence attitudes to the Emirate's participation in government. This reflexive awareness increases the findings' interpretative validity and emphasizes the need for methodological sensitivity in hybrid governance research.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents and interprets data obtained from fieldwork. Out of the 399 questionnaires distributed across wards and communities in the Bida Emirate, 299 were duly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 75 percent. The analysis is based on these valid responses and examines the role of traditional institutions in promoting peaceful electoral governance during the 2023 general elections in Bida Emirate, Niger State.

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Range	18–25	82	27.4
	26–35	109	36.5
	36–45	67	22.4
	46 and above	41	13.7
	Total	299	100
Gender	Male	162	54.2
	Female	137	45.8
	Total	299	100
Marital Status	Single	137	45.8
	Married	162	54.2
	Total	299	100
Educational Qualification	Primary	43	14.4
	Secondary	97	32.4
	Tertiary	159	53.2
	Total	299	100

*Source: Field Work (2025)*

The demographic analysis reveals that most respondents (36.5%) fall within the 26–35 age range, followed by 27.4 percent aged 18–25, indicating a youthful and politically active population. Respondents aged 36–45 (22.4%) and 46 and above (13.7%) form smaller segments of the sample. The gender composition 54.2 percent

male and 45.8 percent female show balanced participation, reflective of the Emirate's community engagement patterns.

Educationally, a majority (53.2%) possess tertiary qualifications, followed by 32.4 percent with secondary education and 14.4 percent with primary education. The relatively high literacy level supports the validity of the responses, suggesting that participants possess the awareness to assess governance processes critically. Overall, the sample reflects a youthful, educated, and gender-inclusive community, offering a credible foundation for examining the intersection of traditional institutions and electoral governance.

**Table 2. Involvement of Traditional Institutions in Preventing Election Violence in Bida Emirate (2023 Elections)**

Items	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Frequency	Total Percentage (%)
Traditional rulers in Bida Emirate were actively involved in promoting peaceful conduct before the 2023 elections.	Strongly Agree	104	34.8	299	100
	Agree	91	30.4		
	Neutral	56	18.7		
	Disagree	27	9.0		
	Strongly Disagree	21	7.0		
Traditional leaders held meetings with community members to discourage electoral violence.	Strongly Agree	97	32.4	299	100
	Agree	88	29.4		
	Neutral	60	20.1		
	Disagree	30	10.0		
	Strongly Disagree	24	8.0		
Traditional institutions collaborated with security agencies during the 2023 elections.	Strongly Agree	83	27.8	299	100
	Agree	101	33.8		
	Neutral	63	21.1		
	Disagree	32	10.7		
	Strongly Disagree	20	6.6		
Traditional leaders played a neutral and non-	Strongly Agree	71	23.7	299	100
	Agree	84	28.1		

Items	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total Frequency	Total Percentage (%)
partisan role during the elections.	Neutral	71	23.7		
	Disagree	45	15.1		
	Strongly Disagree	28	9.4		

*Source: Field Work (2025)*

The results indicate that traditional institutions in the Bida Emirate were significantly engaged in electoral peacebuilding. A total of 65.2 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that traditional rulers were actively involved in promoting peaceful conduct before the 2023 elections, while 61.8 percent confirmed that traditional leaders organized community dialogues to discourage violence. These findings demonstrate that traditional rulers leveraged their moral authority, kinship influence, and local legitimacy to sustain social harmony and discourage youth mobilization for political violence.

Similarly, 61.6 percent of respondents observed active collaboration between traditional institutions and security agencies, underscoring the hybrid nature of governance in Bida Emirate. This partnership reflects the institutional pluralism characteristic of many African governance systems, where traditional authorities complement rather than compete with formal state structures. Such cooperation enhances the credibility of electoral management bodies and reinforces public confidence in state processes.

However, responses on neutrality were more divided: while 51.8 percent of respondents believed that traditional leaders remained impartial, 24.5 percent disagreed, citing possible elite alignments or political sympathy. This mixed perception suggests that while traditional authorities retain high moral capital, sustained efforts are needed to institutionalize accountability and transparency in their electoral engagements.

### *Implications for Governance Legitimacy and Policy Design*

The data show that the active engagement of traditional leaders increased electoral trust, particularly among rural voters, who frequently perceive state agencies as remote or politicized. Traditional monarchs had a moral role in the political process by fostering discussion and nonviolence. This increased governance legitimacy because communities were more inclined to appreciate electoral outcomes that were regarded to be fair and culturally acceptable.

From a policy viewpoint, these findings encourage the inclusion of traditional authority discussions in election preparation and monitoring. Electoral commissions, such as Nigeria's INEC, might formalize advisory platforms in which traditional councils help with voter education, dispute resolution, and early warning measures. Including these functions in election policy will both localize

democratic participation and incorporate indigenous governance systems into national administrative practice.

The Bida Emirate experience is consistent with wider African trends in which traditional authority promotes democratic rule. In Ghana, for example, the National House of Chiefs works with the Electoral Commission to increase voter awareness and avert electoral conflicts, therefore strengthening democratic legitimacy through culturally based methods (Ayee, 2021). Similarly, in Botswana, chiefs act as essential intermediates in local government, contributing to citizen faith in democratic institutions (Sharma 2020). These analogies demonstrate how hybrid governance models may effectively bring together indigenous and contemporary institutions to improve accountability and social order.

The findings confirm that traditional institutions remain critical to election governance in non-Western countries. Their inherent legitimacy and connection to local communities make them co-producers of democratic stability. Integrating these entities into public administration frameworks promotes indigenization of governance by ensuring that policy tools reflect local realities. Institutionalizing traditional authority consultations, codifying their responsibilities in civic education, and embedding them into peace architecture frameworks has the potential to shift Nigerian electoral governance from reactive crisis management to proactive participatory engagement.

### *Hypotheses Testing*

#### *Hypothesis Statement*

H<sub>01</sub>: Traditional institutions have no significant involvement in preventing election-related violence in Bida Emirate during the 2023 elections.

H<sub>11</sub>: Traditional institutions have significant involvement in preventing election-related violence in Bida Emirate during the 2023 elections.

#### *Statistical Technique*

The hypothesis was tested using the Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical method with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 23). The Chi-Square test was appropriate for assessing the association between the categorical variables of traditional institutional involvement and electoral peace outcomes. The analysis was conducted at a 0.05 level of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ).

#### *Decision Rule*

If the calculated p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) is rejected, indicating a statistically significant relationship. Conversely, if the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is retained, suggesting no significant association.

**Table 3. Chi-Square Test Results**

Variable	$\chi^2$ (Chi-Square Value)	df	p-value	Decision
Traditional institutions' involvement in preventing electoral violence	36.482	4	0.000	Reject $H_{01}$

*Source: Field Survey Data, 2025 (SPSS Output)*

The Chi-Square analysis produced a calculated value of  $\chi^2 = 36.482$  with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 threshold. Consequently, the null hypothesis ( $H_{01}$ ) is rejected, confirming that traditional institutions had a statistically significant role in preventing election-related violence in the Bida Emirate during the 2023 general elections.

This result substantiates the earlier descriptive findings, which revealed that traditional leaders actively promoted peace, engaged in voter sensitization, and collaborated with security agencies to mitigate pre- and post-election tensions. Their interventions fostered greater community confidence in electoral procedures, thereby enhancing the perceived legitimacy of electoral governance.

From a theoretical standpoint, this finding aligns with Hybrid Governance Theory and Institutional Pluralism, both of which posit that governance in African contexts functions through the collaboration of formal and informal authorities. Rather than competing with the state, traditional institutions in Bida Emirate complemented the formal electoral framework by leveraging local legitimacy and moral authority to ensure compliance with peaceful electoral conduct.

Comparable experiences in Ghana and Botswana affirm these findings. In Ghana, chiefs play formal advisory roles in electoral conflict resolution and civic education (Ayee, 2022), while in Botswana, the kgotla system institutionalizes public dialogue between traditional leaders and citizens, thereby strengthening democratic legitimacy (Molutsi & Holm, 2021). Such parallels indicate that integrating traditional authority into electoral management enhances community ownership of political processes and reduces the propensity for violence.

The empirical evidence suggests that incorporating traditional institutions into Nigeria's electoral governance architecture can enhance electoral credibility and conflict prevention. Policymakers could institutionalize regular consultations between electoral bodies, traditional councils, and security agencies during election planning. Furthermore, codifying these partnerships within the framework of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s peacebuilding initiatives could formalize the contributions of traditional rulers as mediators and civic educators. Such integration would not only improve local legitimacy but also operationalize a culturally grounded model of hybrid electoral governance suitable for plural societies like Nigeria.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that traditional institutions had an important and integrative role in reducing electoral violence during the Bida Emirate's general elections in 2023. The data shows that their involvement extended beyond community mediation to include systematic coordination with security authorities and civic mobilization initiatives that increased public trust in election procedures. The chi-square test demonstrated a statistically significant link between traditional institutional engagement and reduced election-related violence, demonstrating their continued significance in Nigeria's governance environment.

More crucially, these findings highlight the need to rethink conventional authority as a viable partner in the larger context of institutional integration and policy partnership. Traditional rulers should not be viewed as parallel or informal players but as important components of Nigeria's mixed government framework. Traditional authority can be included inside electoral governance institutions, such as advisory councils, conflict-prevention committees, and civic education projects, to maintain long-term peace and increase procedural legitimacy.

The findings for African election administration systems in general underline the importance of localized legitimacy in maintaining democratic order. Experiences in Ghana, Kenya, and Botswana show that institutionalizing collaboration between electoral organizations and traditional councils boosts confidence, reduces violence, and bridges the gap between formal authority and community structures. Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and comparable agencies throughout the continent might benefit from adopting regulatory frameworks that formalize interaction with traditional leaders during electoral planning and post-election peacebuilding.

However, the scope of this study was confined to a single emirate and electoral cycle, limiting the findings' generalizability. Future research should use comparative and longitudinal methods to investigate differences between areas and electoral eras, focusing on how the type of traditional authority hereditary, appointed, or community-based influences governance results. Qualitative techniques may also give more in-depth insights into conventional institutions' power dynamics, gender aspects, and legitimacy discourses.

Ultimately, incorporating traditional institutions into formal governing procedures is a practical step toward establishing democracy in multiple communities. Hybrid governance systems may bridge cultural and institutional barriers by leveraging indigenous legitimacy and linking it with state power, guaranteeing that Africa's electoral democracy is both locally anchored and normatively valid.

Hence, this study recommends the following six critical agendas to strengthen the integration of traditional authority into electoral governance in Nigeria. First, the federal and state governments should formalize partnerships between traditional institutions and electoral management bodies such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This collaboration should focus on early

warning systems, conflict prevention, and voter education programs at the community level. Second, traditional rulers should be periodically trained in electoral conflict management, civic education, mediation, and community dialogue facilitation. Such capacity-building initiatives will enhance their competence in addressing electoral grievances before they escalate into broader violence. Third, to preserve credibility and public confidence, traditional authorities must maintain strict neutrality throughout the electoral process. Avoiding public endorsement of candidates or political parties will help sustain their legitimacy as impartial custodians of peace and communal integrity. Fourth, the government agencies and traditional councils should organize regular town hall meetings and grassroots sensitization campaigns ahead of elections. These forums should promote tolerance, civic responsibility, and peaceful participation, particularly among youths who form the majority of the electorate.

Fifth, state and local governments should formally embed traditional rulers within existing peace and security architectures through consultative councils or advisory boards. Such institutional recognition would ensure that traditional authorities contribute meaningfully to electoral planning, dispute resolution, and post-election reconciliation efforts. Sixth, the National Assembly should consider enacting policy reforms that define and protect the consultative roles of traditional leaders in democratic governance. Establishing a statutory framework for hybrid governance would enhance coordination between formal and indigenous institutions, fostering stability and trust in Nigeria's electoral system.

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