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Traditional Rulers, Electoral Process, and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Exploring Relevance

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Abstract

This study examines the role of traditional rulers in the Nigerian electoral process with a view to revealing perceptions arising from such engagement, specifically in democratic transitional process. The study also explores opinions of selected traditional ruler ship councils. It adopts a structural-functionalism approach and qualitative method of data analysis. Thus, the paper argues that there are various controversies surrounding the institution of the traditional rulers in Nigeria showing mix of conspiracy, corruption, dictatorship, and disrespect for the rule of law with incumbent political leaders; which suggests that such alignment indices by some traditional rulers are borrowed from modern democratic leaders. Thus, study concludes that the continuous contributions of the traditional rulers in electoral process will further guarantee their relevance in modern democratic governance.

Keywords

traditional ruler, election, electoral process, democratic transition

1. Introduction

The traditional institutions have gone through good and bad times in the country's political history right from the pre-colonial, through the colonial and even up till the post-colonial periods; and have not relented in their commitment to the democratic process in Africa generally, and Nigeria, particularly. However, the relevance of traditional ruler ship institution in African contemporary politics has generated rancorous debates (Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013; Agbese, 2004; Vaughan, 1991). Traditional ruler ship has been a primordial and sacrosanct institution existing before the advent of colonialism in Africa. This indigenous structure appears in different forms as well as in their changing roles from

pre-colonization to the present date in Africa (Ihemeje, 2014; Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013). Traditional institutions are indispensable for political transformation in Africa, as they represent a major part of the continent's history, culture, and governance systems. This view attributes the ineffectiveness of the African State in bringing about sustained socio-economic development due to its neglect of traditional institutions and its failure to restore Africa's own history (Basil Davidson, 1992, cited in Economic Commission for Africa, 2004).

In political reality, traditional rulers cannot be deserted in stabilizing democratic governance in Nigeria, their roles in electoral sensitization, citizenship education and assurance of security of lives and properties cannot be misjudged. Conversely, the muddling up of traditional rulership with modernity, human rituality, and corruption has hi-cupped the structural legality of this indigenous institution which is considered as repulsive to global democratic political folklore. Surprisingly, traditional rulership institution has compromised the tenet of many African traditions where selection of the consecrated position of traditional rulership becomes a commercial vehicle for the highest bidders. Today, this issue has generated vacillating arguments among the scholars about the potentiality and structural qualities of this indigenous institution toward sustainable democracy in Nigeria (Vanghan, 1991; Agbese, 2004; Ofuafor & Amusa, 2012; Ihemeje, 2014).

It was not until the British colonial officials began to realize that colonial success depended greatly on the recognition and involvement of the traditional rulers that they began to patronize and incorporate them into the Indirect Rule system. This realization was not unconnected with the fact that the Europeans discovered that Nigerians were so bound with their traditions and traditional rulers to the extent that whatever they ordered was what the people would do or not do as the case may be. This was the origin of the involvement of the involvement of traditional rulers in colonial government which has received great criticisms from scholars as "criminality" (Emordi & Osiki, 2008, cited in Amusa & Ofuafor, 2012).

Contemporarily, traditional rulers have a great influence in election and electioneering processes in Nigerian democratic politics. The recent observations justify their significant role in electoral engagement. This usually comes inform of paying homage/visiting the traditional rulers during election campaign by the various political contestants; therefore, their roles in the functional electoral processes become a remarkable theme in Nigerian body politics. A very good example is traceable to the visit made by the Presidents of Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan and MuhammaduBuhari to palaces of all first class traditional rulers in Nigeria, including Alaafin of Oyo, Ooni of Ife, Olubadan of Ibadan, Oba of Lagos, Emir of Kano, Obi of Onisha just to mention a few, signaling the mammoth recognition of traditional rulers in the optimum realization of 2011 and 2015 general elections respectively in Nigeria. It is believed that traditional rulers are capable of mobilizing, coordinating, and swaying the choice of the citizens during the election.

There are more "traditional" rulers today than at Independence in 1960. Politicians try to win votes by promising to upgrade chieftaincies or create new ones. Clearly, such rulers continue to strike a chord in

the twenty-first century, when power is diffused and chaotic. One reason for this is that traditional rulers are often more trusted than local and state government officials during post-conflict situations, which are becoming extremely common (Blench et al., 2006; Ochonu, 2010; Daily Independent Newspaper, 2014). Where true traditional chieftaincy institutions exist, government of those countries have willingly or reluctantly accepted, knowingly or unknowingly, that the surest way to win the hearts of the people on major issues of the day has been through the traditional rulers (Sunday Trust Newspaper, 2011).

The institution of traditional rulers is an enduring part of our heritage. It plays a critical role as the custodian of culture and traditions. Expectedly, our traditional rulers are closely linked with the grassroots, and so understand the problems of our people intimately. In our search for peace, order and stability in our society, the institution could be a veritable instrument. It is in the overall interest of our people that this institution in our national life be acknowledged and that clear provisions are made (in the constitution) for its effective functioning (Agbese, 2004; Ihemeje, 2014; The Pointer Newspaper, 2014).

The traditional institutions in Nigeria, particularly the traditional rulership has remained a strong political force to reckon with in the contemporary Nigerian politics in spite of their official and constitutional relegation to the background. This has been made possible by the magnitude of the power and resilience of African traditions and spiritualties which have continued to have great influence in the lives and activities of the Africans (Amusa & Ofuafor, 2012).

Therefore, this study is driven by the need to elucidate the relevance of the traditional rulers' involvement in democratic elections and transition process in deepening democratic governance through the lens of qualitative analysis. The study seeks to establish the roles and contributions of the traditional rulers in the electoral process that ascertains their continuous existence and relationship with modern governance within the purview of Nigerian political culture. The paper is divided into four parts with the first part introducing the thrust of the paper.

2. Method

This article is both explorative and contextual, that is qualitative in nature. In its presentation, it attempts to demystify the discourse with relevant theoretical framework, result/findings, discussion and conclusions that are largely derived from extant literature and field survey on the subject matter.

2.1 Traditional Ruler, Traditional Institution, Election and Electoral Process

This section deals with the discourses of concepts as the foundation of its analysis, review of literatureand juxtaposition with a theoretical approach (Akindele et al., 2012, p. 175; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891).

Despite the egregious misconception about traditional rulership institution which has created a great vacuum in defining what traditional rulership institution should presage, many scholars have been unable to bifurcate diversity inherent from traditional institutional structure as a multi-faceted concept.

However, traditional institution is all encompassing, it constitutes various indigenous institutions which may include traditional festival; the kingship institution, sacerdotal society, age-grade, demi-gods, indigenous financial institution (esusu), etc. Therefore, for the purpose of this work, traditional ruler as a component of traditional institution assigned with certain responsibilities is defined within the context of African political system.

Traditional authorities are the leaders of traditional communities. The word "traditional" refers to historic roots of leadership, which legitimizes the execution of power. There are many existing forms of traditional leadership. In Europe, the rule of kings and nobles was the dominant governing force for a long time until it was gradually replaced by democratic structures. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, traditional authorities are mostly referred to as chiefs and elders (Lutz & Linder, 2004). The National Conference of Traditional Rulers defines a traditional ruler as the person who by virtue of his ancestry occupies the throne or stool of an area and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area and whose throne has been in existence before the advent of the British in Nigeria. The area over which he and his forefathers have ruled or reigned must have at least been created by a Native Authority in 1910 or the date of the introduction of the Native Authority to the area concerned. In the case of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria for example, traditional stools are established according to the customs and traditions of the people and recognized by the Governments in those areas and occupied date of this resolution will not by virtue of this definitions be disqualified, provided also that in respect of other parts of the Federation of Nigeria, traditional stools similarly established prior to the 1st of October 1979, will not by virtue of this definition be disqualified (Agbese, 2004).

A "traditional ruler" may be defined as the traditional head of an ethnic group or clan who is the holderof the highest primary executive authority in an indigenous polity, or who has been appointed to such position in accordance with the customs and tradition of the area concerned by instrument or order of the state government, and whose title is recognized as a traditional ruler title holder by the Government of the State (Ola & Tonwe, 2009, p. 174; Tonwe & Osemwota, 2013).

Traditional ruler refers to a person conferred with indigenous, cultural, and customary-based authority; and whose reign of a monarchy is the accepted controller of the people in their affairs of life. It means a unanimously elected or selected person by a given community to pilot the affairs of his people in line with customs and traditions of the community (Yol, 2010). Traditional rulership institution implies primordial or existing structure designed to rule over the indigenous communities/locales within the range of set norms. This institution derives its power from long established tradition and custom which serves as precedence of the communal behaviors. Traditional ruler precisely rules over the indigenous citizens with specific assigned roles and functions similar to that of government in the modern society.

According to the MartinézCobo Report to the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination of Minorities (1986), indigenous peoples may be identified as follows:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with

pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (cited in Lutz & Linder, 2004).

By traditional institution, it refers to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs (Orji & Olali, 2010, p. 402, cited in Nweke, 2012). The essence of the institutions is to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people (Nweke, 2012).

Miles (1993) identified five modern functions of traditional rulers which include linkages or brokering between grassroots and capital; extension of national identity through the conferral of traditional titles; low level conflict resolution and judicial gate-keeping; ombudsman ship and institutional safety value for overloaded and sub-apportioned bureaucracies.

Any account of social institutions must begin by informally marking off social institutions from other social forms (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2011). An institution is any structure or mechanism or social order governing the behavior of a set of individuals within a given community; may it be human or a specific animal one. Institutions are identified with social purpose, transcending individuals and intentions by mediating the rules that govern living behavior. The term “institution” is commonly applied to custom and behavior patterns important to a society, as well as to particular formal organization or government and public services (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/institution). As it relates to traditional structure, the essence of the institutions is to preserve the customs and traditions of the people and to manage conflicts arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people (Nweke, 2012).

Election may be defined as an act of choosing or selecting one or more from a greater number of persons, things, courses, or rights (Black’s Law Dictionary). It is a formal process of selecting a person for public office or of accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting (Encyclopedia Britannica). Election constitutes major activities in pre-election, election and post-election process, these may include voter’s registration, registration of political party, election campaign, voting guidelines, voting, counting of votes, pronouncement of election results and ventilation of anger against election results at the court of law for proper adjudication. Therefore, election connotes the overall management of electoral processes in a political system.

Elections are central to competitive politics. They are central because, ideally, they should provide the opportunity for yesterday’s winners to become today’s losers, and for yesterday’s losers to become today’s winners. The model of democracy on which this theory of elections is based is liberal democratic. The centrality of elections to liberal democratic politics also presupposes the importance

particularly of impartial electoral administration. This is because the indeterminacy of elections the possibility of erstwhile winners becoming losers and erstwhile losers becoming winners-which is an inherent and necessary prerequisite of liberal democratic politics is to a large extent a function of an impartial administration of elections (Jinadu, 1997, p. 1, cited in Ojo, 2012).

In Nigeria, the set of actions put in place for the management of electoral exercise has been driven by many actors, traditional rulers inclusive. The fundamental role of this rulership institution remains significant in any democratic activity. In view of IDEA (2010), the electoral process comprises of eight segments: legal framework, planning & implementation, training and education, voter registration, electoral campaign, voting operation, verification of results and post-election. However, it can be rightly observed that the involvement of traditional rulers in some of these stated segments become noteworthy owing to their acceptability, responsiveness and practicable input and outputs in governance since the amalgamation till date.

The review clearly indicates that a lot has been done in the aspect of history, roles and challenges of traditional rulers while lacuna on the relevance of traditional rulers in electoral process remains uncovered, hence the significance of this paper.

2.1.1 Structural Functionalism: A Theoretical Approach

Structural functionalism theory is adopted in this study to establish the traditional rulership institution as functional organ within the nucleus of Nigerian society. The relevant contributions of eminent sociologists such as August Comte, Herbert Spencer (organic structure) and Emile Durkheim provide a great insight into functional society. Structural functionalism views society as interconnected objects designed to form a whole part. The various organizations in the society are incorporated to assist each other in order to form a holistic system which works together to achieve a common goal. According to Yol (2010), he argues that functionalism ensures that all societies share the same norms and values while these norms and values are embodied in the law; and that the social order comprises of the internalization of these norms and values through the roles performed by traditional rulers in their communities.

Durkheim attempts to explain the new relationship patterns he observed by theorizing the concept of solidarity. In “division of labour”, Durkheim suggests that smaller communities are linked by tradition and personal relationships. However, as urbanization occurs, a society experiences a denser form of integration and differentiation and, consequently, individuals must adopt more specialized roles in order complement each other. Durkheim describes the former as mechanical solidarity while the latter is considered as organic. Under these circumstances, the subsequent interaction causes another social phenomenon to emerge; one that is distinct from individuals and has a life of its own. He describes this phenomenon as “social facts” or “institutions” (these are norms, beliefs, morals, etc.). According to Durkheim, social integration depends on the proper maintenance of this system of values as well as the extent to which they are commonly shared, by what he refers to as the “collective conscience” (Durkheim & Halls, 1984, cited in Harper, 2011). Chiefs and kings have for centuries been custodians

of Africa/s culture and heritage. They have also been a symbol of the people's voice. However, they have authority over traditional laws and customs, and chiefs have a great deal of influence in the community (BBC News Friday, 2004). Therefore, traditional rulership institution becomes crucial element in the functional society; it regulates, normalizes, contributes and partakes in the societal activities, thus seen as viable instrument in Nigerian electoral processes because its roles are immeasurable in the peaceful political conducts in the society. Tonwe and Osemwota (2013) observed that the traditional ruler formed the nucleus of governance. One striking fact is that the geographical spheres of authority of these traditional rulers are essentially localized and no traditional ruler ever had jurisdiction over the entire geographical area of modern Nigeria. Similarly, Erero (2005) posits that given the considerable diversity and cultural heterogeneity of Nigerian society, any generalizations on traditional structures of government would be pretentious.

In the foregoing, it is evident that traditional rulers are recognized as one of the significant social institutions which regulate the functionality of African political system. Their role is very crucial in the sustenance of democratic governance as it reflects in colonial regime as a viable instrument for the realization of general administration of government in Nigeria.

2.1.2 Traditional Rulers and the Nigerian Electoral Process: Gain or Pain

This section evaluates the views of scholars, tagged, "traditional rulers and the Nigerian electoral process: gain or pain", and responses from field survey systematically complement the analysis.

The survey data comprised careful use of responses from select traditional rulers' councils in Anambra, Edo, Oyo and Kwara States; drawn from South-east, South-south, South-west and North-central geopolitical zones of Nigeria between 2012 and 2013. The data were purposively selected since elections were conducted in those zones that engaged the services of traditional rulers in terms of consultation, political meetings/courtesy calls, blessing, advice, and importantly, voters' education. The analysis covers aspects of structural functionalism that are tied to electoral process where traditional rulers were actively involved as well as their subjects.

Historically, African traditional institutions of governance are diverse. They have evolved significantly from their pre-colonial forms in tandem with transformation of the continent's political systems, during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Despite their complex diversity, much of the post-independence literature classifies African traditional institutions of governance into two types, based on their pre-colonial forms: (a) the consensus-based systems of the decentralized pre-colonial political systems; and (b) chieftaincy of the centralized political systems (Economic Commission for Africa, 2010). The intrusion of colonialism dismantled the structures of traditional absolutism in virtually all the indigenous ethnic nationalities of the South-South zone in the Nigeria. The use of gunboat diplomacy and brute force, cowered these paramount rulers into submission in the face of a more sophisticated weaponry and tactics of the West (Orji, 2013).

The Lyttelton constitution 1954 (revised in 1957) greatly reduced the constitutional powers of the traditional rulers both at the centre and in the regions. At the federal level, the legislature was divided

into two Houses: The Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate was composed of 12 representatives appointed by the Governors of the regions. The Governor-General also appointed two representatives for Lagos while the Chiefs of Lagos elected one. The Oba of Lagos was automatically a member. The House of Representatives consisted of 320 members who were directly elected, for the first time; the House of Chiefs played no role in this process. Members of the House of Chiefs were not allowed to be members of the Senate, nor member of any regional legislature (Fajonyomi, n.d.). Observably, the gradual relegation of constitutional powers of the kings set in after this period.

A review of extant literatures on traditional rulership institutions revealed the rationale behind their institutional demotion, which includes: self-inflicted (partisanship in politics, defecation of traditional values, lack of integrity by some, money-for-chieftaincy policies, in-fighting; military dictatorship (clipping of wings and enthronement of subservient culture); social malaise (moral decay in the society, lack of respect for elders and constituted authority—including traditional institutions); dwindling sphere of influence and breaking down of the "kingdom" overseen by the traditional rulers); conflict of interest and authority between local government authorities and traditional rulers; globalization (waning influence and interest in monarchies, and traditional institutions worldwide); politics (party politics have been played in a manner to undermine the influence of traditional rulers over local voters); the economy (begging for financial support from subjects); abuse of privilege, such as giving chieftaincy titles and honors to less deserving members of the society has created a society with false values, and negative role models (Fayonjomi, n.d.).

Correspondingly and as noted earlier, immediately after independence, the powers and authority of the traditional institutions declined as their continuous existence depended on the whims and caprices of the Nigerian government. During this new period, the closeness between the traditional institutions and the political class affected the institutions so much. The integration of traditional and modern politics helped to retain and reformulate traditional and state's politics in the newly independent Nigerian States. It has been argued that successful military regimes in Nigeria from 1966 relied on traditional institutions for their legitimacy, thereby further politicizing the institutions. More traditional rulers were appointed depending on those they supported in power. With time and due to personal aggrandizement, traditional institutions diminished over time in the usual sovereignty over their people. Others who were not loyal, so to say, were removed or suspended (Omotosho, 2010, cited in Nweke, 2012). Concurrently, there are other obstacles confronting the indigenous structure of traditional rulers as it is premised in constitutional lacuna, this was corroborated in Nigerian Daily that:

The constitution has no direct role for traditional rulers. This lacuna has led to a groundswell of calls from monarchs and traditionalists for a direct constitutional function for our royal fathers. This is how it should be in a republic. And really, in many places, our people still rely upon and trust their traditional rulers in making choices on politics, economic activities, education and taking social action. This is an invaluable social capital that any politician will give just anything to have (Daily Independent Newspaper, 2014).

Within a constitutional context, the 1960 and 1963 constitutions created a Council of Chiefs for them in the regions and some of them were even regional governors. The 1979 Constitution gave them representation in the National Council of State. The current 1999 Constitution did not even mention the traditional institution. Is this not enough indicator of their plight and dwindling prestige? (Leadership Newspaper quoted in Nigerian-Newspaper.com).

State governments frequently create new "traditional" thrones. This reflects their continuing interests in the traditional political institutions. The Benue State government, for instance, created several new second-class chiefs in the state in 1997. Although created in the name of customs and traditions; these are brand new institutions that have no precedence in the political experience of the people of Benue State. Interestingly, part of the justification for traditional rulership is that it is a mode of governance indigenously created by Africans long before the continent was colonized by Europeans. As the action of the Benue State in creating new second-class chiefs has shown however, some of these traditional rulership institutions have no connection with the pre-colonial political realities of Africa. Thus, in this context, tradition is merely invoked in response to modern political exigencies. At the federal level, a new institution called the National Council of Traditional Rulers was created; comprising 74 graded rulers from all the thirty-six states and the Abuja Capital Territory, it was created to "serve as a consultative assembly through which the federal government would feel the pulse of the grassroots communities". Government's interests in the institution can also be deduced from the fact that most state governors have special advisers for chieftaincy affairs (Agbese, 2004).

In the same vein, military administrators conferred importance on traditional rulers by their demonstrated eagerness to pay homage to prominent traditional rulers as soon as they assumed office as military governors. Under military rule, it became a tradition that the first place of call for a newly appointed military governor to any of the thirty-six states was the palace of the leading traditional ruler in the state. Through this open homage to traditional rulers, military governors sought to cloak themselves in the legitimacy which the indigenous political institutions are believed to confer on people. Traditional rulers on their part would pledge their loyalty and the loyalty of their people, to the new regime. In an ironic twist, which is crystal clear indicates that the frequent government intervention in chieftaincy affairs reflects the importance which various state governments attach to the institution (Agbese, 2004).

Intuitively, intervention in chieftaincy affairs takes place in form of demotion, deposition, and banishment of traditional rulers as a way to punish erring royal fathers who do not do the bidding of the government of the day. Sequel to this view, Alhaji Muhammadu Sanusi, the Emir of Kano, Olateru Olagbegi, the Olowo of Owo and Ibrahim Dasuki, Sultan of Sokoto are among prominent traditional rulers who have been deposed by various state governments and were also banished from their kingdoms. In the same vein, during the turbulent era of party politics in the Second Republic, many state governors sought wider powers over chieftaincy matters. The Ogun State House of Assembly passed a bill giving the state governor such powers. This action however led to several clashes between

state governors and traditional rulers. As Afriscopemagazine pointed out: "within the first two years [of the Second Republic], almost every state has witnessed conflicts of one form or another between its government functionaries and its traditional rulers, leaving a trail of heightened tension in as many as eleven states". Governor Jim Nwobodo of Anambra State expressed his displeasure with the Obi of Onitsha, OfalaOkagbue, by dropping him as the state's representative to the National Council of State. Governor Sam Mbakwe of Imo State ordered that the title, "His Royal Highness", should be dropped from the names of traditional rulers in Imo. In Kano, Governor AbubakarRimi issued a query to the Emir of Kano, Ado Bayero, alleging that the Emir had engaged in acts of disrespect to the governor's administration. The governor's query to the Emir precipitated violent mob demonstrations which led to the death of the governor's political adviser, Bala Mohammed. Several government buildings in Kano and the homes of some politicians were also burnt during the fracas (Agbese, 2004).

The post-colonial state has criminalized the factual indigenous structure in Nigeria, these is evident in major suspension of traditional rulers as it is also exemplified in the removal of Deji of Akure in South Western Nigeria who was alleged of brutally beating his wife as against the courtesy of fundamental disposition of traditional ruler as a symbolic personality in the society. In tandem with foregoing, the most recent endorsement in the fourth republic of Lamido Sanusi (Former Central Bank Governor) by the Kano State Governor as an Emir of Kano generated violence in Kano State signaling how post-colonial state influenced the indigenous institution that presumed to revere customs and traditions of the society in question. It is believed that the formal institutional structure coordinates and determines the existence and recognition of traditional rulership institution which has become the bane of indigenous society in Nigeria. The empirical evidence has revealed that during military and civilian regimes, countless number of traditional rulers were demoted, suspended or removed by the state.

2.1.3 Responses from the Field Survey Analyzed

Amidst all the above-mentioned setbacks, traditional rulers still maintain some democratic roles: broker between the people and the state; enhancing national identity; and providing an institutional safety-valve for inadequate bureaucracies. Specifically, traditional rulership institutions have been acknowledged as veritable instruments for voters' mobilization and civic education in electoral processes. Though, some of the traditional rulers still engross in party politicking, selecting party candidacy, and drumming support for party. As reported by Ihemeje (2014), traditional rulers directly or indirectly influence the choice of candidacy through advice received from the council of states or council of traditional rulers in a state. Furthermore, Ihemeje (2014) expatiated that this view was demonstrated at the instances of Adam Oshiomole and Isiaka Ajumobi of Action Congress of Nigeria, now All Progressive Congress (APC), they emerged as Governors of Edo and Oyo States respectively because they were endorsed by traditional rulers and chiefs of their respective states.

3. Result/Finding

Findings from field survey revealed that prominent traditional rulers in Nigeria have been fully involved in the Nigerian electoral processes. Ayuba, a high chief from Ilorin Emirate Council (2013 as cited in Ihemeje, 2014) noted that traditional rulers have indirect role in electoral process as they are been heavily relied on, because they are close to the community, endowed with wisdom drawn from tradition and culture in their various domains. It is important to note that human beings are political animals so also the traditional rulers, but they however do not own or form political party. What they do essentially in electoral process is to engage in enlightenment programs for their subjects before elections such as those involving registrations, voting and peace-making. Ayuba (2013 as cited in Ihemeje, 2014) further expressed that they also organized meetings with security officials toward a hitch-free election exercise. In his statement, Ayuba opined that one may think a good traditional ruler should not be a politician rather he should have interest in political party and candidates by taking cognizance of their manifestoes. However, their main role is to galvanize and sensitize their subjects to participate in elections and ensuring that they are well-behaved during and after elections. This clearly indicates that their role cannot be overemphasized as far as the electoral process is concerned in Nigeria.

High Chief OfiliUkpabi, a titled chief and member of the traditional rulers' council discussed extensively on the role of traditional rulers in Nigerian electoral process. As a chief cabinet member of IgweNnaemeka Achebe, Obi of Onitsha, Anambra State, he revealed that traditional rulers are very instrumental to ensuring development, peace and stability in the country's political system. Ihemeje (2014) noted during the course of interview with the mentioned High Chief that these roles played by traditional rulers reflect positively on their impact in the country's electoral process. For instance, no traditional ruler would be satisfied with rigging, thuggery and hooliganism during elections. So, their role is very crucial towards the successful conduct of elections. What they do in most cases include holding meetings and deliberating how to ensure hitch-free elections with their chiefs and subjects. Ukpabi (2012 as cited in Ihemeje, 2014) demonstrated that they give political education to their subjects to include those at home and in diaspora. They used the media, town meetings, traditional council meetings, and other important avenues to disseminate electoral messages. They do not directly get involved in politics however; rather buy into the programs of a given political party. However, the role they play in the electoral process is very germane, particularly in the fourth republic. Between 1999 and 2011, their impacts have been rewarding and even became more unprecedented since 2002, being the period that marked the installment of IgweNnaemeka Achebe, Obi of Onitsha in the case of Anambra State. Other sister states in the South-east geopolitical zone have also borrowed a great deal of proper conduct in the electoral process from his royal highness, IgweNnaemeka Achebe. I mean traditional rulers of Imo, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi States respectively.

Ladigbolu, a high chief from Oyo traditional ruling council (2013 as cited in Ihemeje, 2014) commented on the role of Alaafin of Oyo as a traditional ruler in Nigerian electoral processes. He

stressed that the traditional ruler like that of the Alaafin of Oyo performs a pertinent role in the electoral process particularly in ensuring that wrong electoral procedures are contested. For instance, Alaafin of Oyo does not dabble into electoral disruptions, as it were. As part of the role played by a traditional ruler in an electoral process include the acceptance and upholding of the electoral acts, defending the course of credible elections, that is to say, one-man-one-vote. The traditional ruler, in his wisdom, also ensures that his subjects have periodic and quality political education, before, during and after elections. In the view of Ladigbolu, "what weakens electoral process in Nigeria is essentially the introduction of human weakness against the electoral laws such as rigging through multiple voting, snatching of ballot boxes, thuggery, and electoral violence. And of course, you would agree with me that Oyo State is enmeshed with electoral volatility when compared with other states in the country" (Ladigbolu, 2013, as cited in Ihemeje, 2014). He believed that the traditional ruler should be amenable to information regarding electoral process. To a very large extent, the Alaafin of Oyo had been very supportive in the electoral process.

In Edebiri's view, a high chief and second in command to the then Oba of Benin observed that the Oba of Benin is the traditional head of all the traditional rulers in Edo State and of course, a very strong force to reckon with as far as traditional rulership is concerned in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world over. He noted: our traditional ruler had never been neutral in matters of electoral process as he had been actively involved in different electoral periods which ensured electoral-violence free moments. He had at different times advocated for a free and fair level-play ground to various political parties. Our traditional ruler periodically used his chiefs to champion effective electoral process in their domains as well as localities. As part of his contribution to the electoral process, he equally enlightened subjects in different domains on voters' education and rights. It is on the basis of his contribution and those of the chiefs that he is popularly respected (Edebiri, 2012, as cited in Ihemeje, 2014).

4. Discussion

Inferences can be drawn from the various responses of the eminent high chiefs on behalf of their traditional rulers with respect to the subject: traditional rulers, electoral process and Nigeria's fourth republic. Significantly, Chief Ayuba of Ilorin Emirate Council agreed that individual and collective responsiveness of traditional rulership institutions to electoral process in Nigeria was borne out of the intermediary roles they play in governance, especially between the government and grassroots. He added and maintained that such pivotal effort is hitherto practiced since the return to civil rule, between1999 and 2011, being democratic periods when elections were held (Ayuba, 2013, in cited Ihemeje, 2014). The practice was equally extended to the 2015 elections that brought Mr. MuhammaduBuhari to power.

In view of Archbishop Ladigbolu of Oyo Council of Traditional Rulers and Chiefs, he opined that Alaafin as well as most paramount rulers in the country perform such electoral intermediary functions due to the fact that they are not just the custodians of indigenous culture, customs and tradition, but also

serve as watchdogs for the people. And as such, they have so much to offer and gain when their electoral roles are effectively and efficiently carried out. On the issue of neutrality or anonymity, virtually all the traditional rulers could be seen not to be partisan politicians (Ladigbolu, 2013, as cited in Ihemeje, 2014). To them, they got involved in matters that bothered on sensitizing, galvanizing and disseminating political education to their subjects for elections, where their impacts were directly seen and felt.

Remarkably, Chief Ukpabi of Anambra State Council of Traditional Rulers and Chiefs, in his assessment on "neutrality" and condition that necessitate such, he said that neutrality could not yield any positive result for the community because when traditional rulers were passive in participating in electoral process, electorates might not believe and participate in elections, as community and infrastructural development would be low. Clarifying further, he noted that people should not term such role played by traditional rulers in the electoral process as being actively involved in politics, they perform such roles simply because the constitution and electoral laws permit them to do so (Ukpabi, 2012, as cited in Ihemeje, 2014).

Corroboratively, Chief Edebiri of Edo State Council of Traditional Rulers and Chiefs opined that "no traditional ruler was allowed to play politics as stipulated by the constitution of Nigeria, but people usually misconstrued the electoral functions with active politics". To him, they are different in the sense that the role played by monarchs in electoral process does not necessarily accord them partisan politicians rather; they perform such role so as to reach out to their subjects. Although, he added that a traditional ruler may decide not to partake in electoral process, if he so wishes. On the other hand, neutrality could mean not belonging or supporting any political party and which of course, is not publicly pronounced but perceived (Edebiri, 2012, as cited in Ihemeje, 2014). Nevertheless, the respondent showered encomia on traditional rulership institution for their contributions in the electoral process in Nigeria since 1999; hence seen as source of support to the modern governance system.

5. Conclusion

The pivotal role of galvanizing and sensitizing citizens in various domains by traditional rulers prior to, and during electioneering periods in Nigeria's fourth republic are well recognized; which is however translated to the nature of co-operation enjoyed among electoral officials and the government. However, this paper argues that mix of conspiracy, corruption, dictatorship between incumbent political leaders and traditional rulers exist; yet, it remains inevitable to alienate the institution of traditional rulers from the electoral process due to their place, role and contributions in the larger political landscape of the country. Keeping in mind that, politics is culture-bound; the paper therefore identifies the potency of continuous systematic integration of traditional rulers in the nation's electoral process and recommends their harmonious relationship with the electoral commissions, the press, the political party, civil society organizations, and the electorate, as it will continue to enhance their relevance in Nigeria's electoral process, and in tandem with their fatherly roles as custodians of people, culture, custom and traditions

which of course, translates to political maturity they often portray in deepening democratic governance.

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