TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN SHIRORO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NIGER STATE: CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Persistent conflicts in rural Nigeria continue to expose the limitations of traditional institutions in effective conflict management. This study examined the challenges, limitations, and policy implications of traditional institutions in conflict management in Shiroro Local Government Area, Niger State. The study adopted a mixed methods approach using a convergent parallel design, combining descriptive survey and case study techniques. A sample of 600 respondents was selected through multistage sampling, while data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and observation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between institutional challenges and conflict management, indicating that factors such as insecurity, lack of legal authority, and weak enforcement reduce the effectiveness of traditional institutions. Conversely, policy interventions such as legal recognition, institutional integration, and capacity building demonstrated a statistically significant positive influence on conflict management outcomes. These results suggest that while traditional institutions face substantial limitations, appropriate policy frameworks can enhance their performance. The study concludes that strengthening institutional capacity and addressing structural constraints are essential for improving conflict management. It recommends legal reforms, institutional integration, and targeted support to enhance the effectiveness of traditional institutions.

1.0 Introduction

Challenges and limitations in conflict management continue to undermine peacebuilding efforts across many parts of the world, particularly in fragile and conflict prone societies. Despite the existence of both formal and informal mechanisms, the persistence of violent conflicts suggests deep structural weaknesses in governance and institutional coordination. Recent studies argue that while traditional institutions remain central to local conflict resolution, they face increasing constraints due to modernization, state dominance, and evolving conflict dynamics (Ololube, 2025; Otu & Joseph, 2026). These challenges limit their capacity to respond effectively to complex conflicts, raising critical concerns about their sustainability and relevance in contemporary conflict management systems.

Globally, there is growing recognition of the limitations of indigenous conflict resolution systems, especially in contexts characterized by transnational threats and organized violence. Scholars highlight that traditional institutions often lack the legal authority and resources required to address modern security challenges, including armed insurgency and criminal networks (Liadi, 2024). Furthermore, the absence of formal integration with state institutions creates institutional fragmentation, reducing the overall effectiveness of conflict management frameworks. This has led to increased calls for policy reforms that bridge the gap between traditional and formal governance systems.

In Africa, traditional institutions have historically served as custodians of peace and social order, yet their functionality is increasingly constrained by structural and political factors. Empirical evidence shows that issues such as political interference, erosion of cultural authority, and limited institutional capacity have weakened their effectiveness (Omang & Etila, 2024). Additionally, the transformation of conflict patterns, particularly the rise of violent extremism and resource based conflicts, has exposed the limitations of traditional mechanisms that were originally designed for localized disputes. These developments necessitate a critical reassessment of the role of traditional institutions within evolving conflict environments.

Nigeria presents a complex case where traditional institutions coexist with formal governance structures but often operate under significant constraints. While traditional rulers continue to play important roles in mediating conflicts, their effectiveness is frequently undermined by lack of constitutional recognition and limited enforcement powers. Studies indicate that governance gaps, weak institutional linkages, and competing authorities contribute to inefficiencies in conflict management (Oluwasanmi & Agbonifo, 2025). These challenges are further compounded by insecurity and political dynamics that affect the neutrality and legitimacy of traditional institutions.

At the sub national level, rural areas such as Shiroro Local Government Area in Niger State exemplify the intersection of traditional authority and contemporary conflict challenges. The area has experienced recurring conflicts including farmer herder clashes, banditry, and land disputes, which have tested the capacity of traditional institutions to maintain peace. Evidence from the study area shows that while traditional leaders remain actively involved in conflict resolution, their efforts are often constrained by external threats, lack of resources, and limited collaboration with formal security agencies . These constraints highlight the growing gap between the expectations

placed on traditional institutions and their actual capacity to deliver effective outcomes.

The limitations of traditional conflict management mechanisms in Shiroro are further reflected in their inability to address complex and large scale conflicts. While indigenous approaches such as mediation and reconciliation remain effective for minor disputes, they are less capable of managing conflicts involving armed groups and organized violence. This underscores the need for adaptive strategies and policy interventions that enhance the resilience and capacity of traditional institutions. Without such reforms, the effectiveness of these institutions may continue to decline in the face of evolving conflict dynamics.

Despite the recognized importance of traditional institutions, there is limited empirical understanding of the specific challenges and limitations affecting their performance in conflict management within local contexts. In Shiroro LGA, existing studies have largely focused on their roles and effectiveness, with insufficient attention to the structural and institutional barriers that constrain their operations . This creates a knowledge gap that hinders the development of targeted policy interventions aimed at strengthening traditional conflict management systems.

Furthermore, the persistence of conflicts in Shiroro despite the active involvement of traditional institutions raises critical questions about the adequacy of existing frameworks and policies. The interplay between institutional limitations, governance challenges, and evolving conflict patterns remains poorly understood. Therefore, there is a pressing need to examine the challenges and limitations of traditional institutions in conflict management and explore policy implications for improving their effectiveness. Addressing this problem is essential for enhancing local security, strengthening governance, and promoting sustainable peace in the study area. Building on the identified gaps and emerging concerns, this study is guided by specific objectives focusing on the challenges, limitations, and policy implications of traditional institutions in conflict management:

i. To examine the challenges and limitations facing traditional institutions in conflict management in Shiroro Local Government Area, Niger State.

ii. To analyse the policy implications for strengthening the role of traditional institutions in conflict management in Shiroro Local Government Area.

2.0 Literature Review

Conflict Management Challenges

Conflict management challenges refer to the structural, institutional, and operational barriers that hinder the effective resolution and prevention of conflicts. Contemporary literature conceptualizes these challenges as multidimensional, including governance deficits, resource constraints, weak institutional coordination, and evolving conflict dynamics (Ololube, 2025; Liadi, 2024; Anusi, 2025). Scholars emphasize that modern conflicts, particularly in developing countries, are increasingly complex, involving armed actors, transnational networks, and socio economic pressures that overwhelm existing systems (Otu & Joseph, 2026; Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025). In African contexts, conflict management challenges are further compounded by the coexistence of formal and informal institutions, often leading to fragmentation and inefficiency (Omang & Etila, 2024; Abimbola & Adewoyin, 2025). Empirical studies highlight issues such as political interference, lack of legal backing, and

inadequate capacity as key constraints (Igbashangev, 2024; John Oti, 2025; Modeyin, Oisamoje, & Asemah, 2025). Additionally, insecurity and limited state presence exacerbate these challenges at the grassroots level (Orimaye, Olusanya, Akintola, & Ajayi, 2025; Oluyemi & Akinwunmi, 2025). In this study, conflict management challenges are conceptualized as the structural and contextual limitations that constrain the ability of traditional institutions to effectively manage conflicts in Shiroro LGA.

Challenges and Limitations of Traditional Institutions

The challenges and limitations of traditional institutions in conflict management have attracted significant scholarly attention, particularly in the context of changing governance structures. Recent studies define these limitations as constraints related to authority, capacity, legitimacy, and adaptability (Omang & Etila, 2024; Oluyemi & Akinwunmi, 2025; Igbashangev, 2024). One major limitation identified is the lack of constitutional recognition, which restricts enforcement powers and weakens institutional authority (Oluwasanmi & Agbonifo, 2025). Scholars also point to political interference and elite capture as factors that undermine neutrality and public trust (Abimbola & Adewoyin, 2025; Anusi, 2025). Additionally, traditional institutions often lack the resources and technical capacity required to address modern conflicts, particularly those involving armed groups and large scale violence (Liadi, 2024; Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025). Cultural erosion and generational shifts have also affected their legitimacy and influence in some communities (Otu & Joseph, 2026; John Oti, 2025). Empirical evidence further highlights poor coordination with formal institutions as a critical limitation (Modeyin & Inobemhe, 2025; Orimaye et al., 2025). In this study, these challenges are conceptualized as institutional and contextual constraints that limit the effectiveness of traditional institutions in conflict management.

Policy Implications for Conflict Management

Policy implications in conflict management refer to strategic actions and institutional reforms aimed at improving the effectiveness of conflict resolution systems. Recent literature conceptualizes policy implications as encompassing legal frameworks, institutional integration, capacity building, and governance reforms (Liadi, 2024; Ololube, 2025; Oluyemi & Akinwunmi, 2025). Scholars argue that effective policies must bridge the gap between traditional and formal systems to enhance coordination and legitimacy (Oluwasanmi & Agbonifo, 2025; Omang & Etila, 2024). In Nigeria, studies emphasize the need for constitutional recognition of traditional institutions and structured collaboration with state security agencies (Abimbola & Adewoyin, 2025; Igbashangev, 2024). Policy oriented research also highlights the importance of capacity building, funding support, and institutional strengthening to address emerging security challenges (Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025; Otu & Joseph, 2026). Furthermore, community driven approaches and inclusive governance frameworks are identified as critical for sustainable peace (Anusi, 2025; Modeyin, Oisamoje, & Asemah, 2025; Orimaye et al., 2025). In this study, policy implications are conceptualized as actionable strategies and institutional reforms required to strengthen traditional institutions and enhance conflict management outcomes in Shiroro LGA.

2.1 Review of Related Empirical Literature

Challenges and Limitations of Traditional Institutions and Conflict Management

Empirical studies on the relationship between challenges and limitations of traditional institutions and conflict management reveal significant constraints affecting peacebuilding outcomes in Africa. In Nigeria, Omang and Etila (2024) found that political interference and institutional marginalization weaken the capacity of traditional rulers to manage conflicts effectively. Similarly, Oluwasanmi and Agbonifo (2025) reported that lack of legal recognition limits enforcement power, thereby reducing the effectiveness of traditional dispute resolution. Abimbola and Adewoyin (2025) observed that land related conflicts persist due to institutional fragmentation and overlapping authorities. Studies by Igbashangev (2024) show that traditional institutions face declining legitimacy due to modernization and changing social values. Liadi (2024) further identified governance gaps and poor coordination as major constraints in Nigeria's conflict management system. Empirical evidence from Modeyin and Inobemhe (2025) highlights communication gaps and weak collaboration as key limitations. Orimaye, Olusanya, Akintola, and Ajayi (2025) found that resource constraints and weak institutional capacity hinder effectiveness. Additional studies confirm that insecurity and armed conflict exceed the capacity of traditional systems (Otu & Joseph, 2026; Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025; Anusi, 2025; John Oti, 2025; Ololube, 2025). Overall, these findings demonstrate that structural and institutional challenges significantly undermine conflict management outcomes.

Policy Implications and Conflict Management

Empirical literature on policy implications and conflict management emphasizes the need for institutional reforms to enhance peacebuilding effectiveness. Studies indicate that integrating traditional institutions into formal governance frameworks significantly improves conflict management outcomes. Oluyemi and Akinwunmi (2025) found that hybrid governance models enhance coordination and reduce conflict recurrence. Similarly, Liadi (2024) reported that policy driven institutional reforms strengthen peacekeeping capacity in Nigeria. Omang and Etila (2024) highlighted that clear legal frameworks improve the legitimacy and functionality of traditional institutions. Research by Abimbola and Adewoyin (2025) shows that policy support for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms reduces resource based conflicts. Igbashangev (2024) emphasized the importance of strengthening traditional authority through legal and administrative backing. Studies by Modeyin, Oisamoje, and Asemah (2025) demonstrate that improved communication policies enhance conflict mediation outcomes. Otu and Joseph (2026) also found that institutional innovation improves coordination in conflict management. Additional empirical evidence supports capacity building and funding as critical policy interventions (Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025; Anusi, 2025; Orimaye et al., 2025; John Oti, 2025; Ololube, 2025). Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of policy reforms in strengthening traditional institutions and improving conflict management effectiveness.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Institutional Theory, as advanced by scholars such as

Douglass North and later expanded in contemporary governance studies. The theory explains how institutions, both formal and informal, shape social order, behavior, and outcomes within a society. It assumes that effective conflict management depends on the strength, legitimacy, and coordination of institutions. Where institutions are weak, poorly structured, or lack legal backing, their capacity to manage conflicts is significantly constrained. The theory further posits that institutional inefficiencies such as overlapping roles, inadequate resources, and lack of enforcement mechanisms contribute to persistent conflicts and governance failures.

The relevance of Institutional Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain the challenges and limitations facing traditional institutions in Shiroro LGA. It provides a framework for understanding how issues such as lack of constitutional recognition, political interference, and weak integration with formal systems undermine the effectiveness of traditional conflict management. The theory also supports the need for policy reforms aimed at strengthening institutional capacity and coordination. Empirical studies have applied this framework extensively. For instance, Ololube (2025) found that weak institutional structures limit public sector conflict management effectiveness. Similarly, Liadi (2024) identified governance and institutional gaps as key constraints in Nigeria's peacebuilding efforts. Omang and Etila (2024) further showed that institutional fragmentation reduces the efficiency of traditional systems. Thus, the theory provides a strong basis for analyzing both the limitations and policy implications of traditional institutions in conflict management.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methods approach using a convergent parallel design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to examine the challenges, limitations, and policy implications of traditional institutions in conflict management in Shiroro Local Government Area. The quantitative component utilized a descriptive survey design to obtain generalisable data on institutional constraints, while the qualitative component employed a case study approach to provide deeper insights into structural and policy related issues affecting traditional conflict management.

The study area, Shiroro LGA in Niger State, is characterized by diverse ethnic groups and recurring conflicts including farmer herder clashes, land disputes, and banditry between 2015 and 2023. The study population comprised residents, traditional rulers, community leaders, and government officials. From a projected population of 404,200, a sample size of 600 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula at a 4 percent margin of error. A multistage sampling technique was employed, involving purposive selection of the study area, stratification across 15 wards, proportionate sampling of villages, and systematic random sampling of respondents.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires, in depth interviews, and observation, focusing on institutional challenges, limitations, and policy issues. Secondary data were sourced from journals, reports, and official publications. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic content analysis, ensuring triangulation and validity of findings.

3.1 Measurement of Variables

The variables in this study were operationalized based on the key constructs of conflict management challenges (dependent variable) and the independent variables of challenges and limitations of traditional institutions and policy implications. Conflict management challenges were measured using indicators such as frequency of unresolved conflicts, persistence of violence, institutional inefficiencies, and perceived inadequacy of existing conflict management systems. Respondents rated these using structured questionnaire items.

The challenges and limitations of traditional institutions were measured through indicators including lack of legal authority, political interference, inadequate resources, weak enforcement capacity, and poor coordination with formal institutions. These were assessed through both closed ended survey questions and qualitative interview responses.

The policy implications variable was measured using indicators such as need for legal recognition, institutional integration, capacity building, funding support, and collaboration with security agencies. Respondents provided perceptions on the relevance and effectiveness of these policy measures.

The measurement approach combined quantitative indicators with qualitative insights to ensure a comprehensive assessment of institutional challenges and policy directions for improving conflict management in Shiroro LGA.

4.0 Result and Findings

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	360	60%
Female	240	40%
Total	600	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table 1 shows that male respondents constitute the majority of the sample, accounting for 60 percent, while females represent 40 percent. This reflects the gender distribution within the study area where men are more actively involved in community leadership and conflict management processes. However, the inclusion of women provides balanced perspectives, especially considering their roles in peacebuilding and social cohesion. The distribution enhances the reliability of the data, as it captures diverse viewpoints across gender groups in Shiroro Local Government Area.

Table 2: Persistence of Conflicts

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
High Recurrence	360	60%
Moderate	180	30%
Low	60	10%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The findings in table 2 indicate that conflicts persist at a high rate in Shiroro Local Government Area, with 60 percent of respondents reporting frequent recurrence. This suggests that existing conflict management systems, including traditional institutions, face significant challenges in sustaining long term peace. The moderate and low categories further confirm that while some conflicts are resolved, many re occur due to underlying structural issues. This highlights the need to address institutional limitations affecting effective conflict management.

Table 3: Challenges Facing Traditional Institutions

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Security Threats	420	70%
Lack of Legal Power	360	60%
Political Interference	300	50%
Poor Funding	240	40%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table 3 reveals that security threats are the most significant challenge facing traditional institutions, followed by lack of legal authority and political interference. These challenges significantly weaken the capacity of traditional leaders to manage conflicts effectively. Poor funding further limits operational efficiency. The findings indicate that traditional institutions operate within constrained environments, which reduces their ability to respond to increasingly complex conflicts in the study area.

Table 4: Institutional Limitations

Limitation	Frequency	Percentage
Weak Enforcement	360	60%
Poor Coordination	300	50%

Limited Capacity	330	55%
Loss of Authority	240	40%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table 3 indicates that weak enforcement mechanisms are a major limitation, as traditional institutions lack the legal backing to enforce decisions. Poor coordination with formal institutions further complicates conflict management efforts. Limited capacity and declining authority also affect their effectiveness. These findings demonstrate that institutional weaknesses significantly constrain the performance of traditional institutions in Shiroro.

Table 5: Policy Implications

Policy Measure	Frequency	Percentage
Legal Recognition	420	70%
Integration with State	390	65%
Capacity Building	360	60%
Funding Support	300	50%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table shows strong support for policy reforms, particularly legal recognition and integration with formal institutions. Capacity building and funding support are also identified as critical measures. These findings suggest that addressing institutional gaps through policy interventions can significantly enhance the effectiveness of traditional institutions in conflict management.

4.6 Interview Findings

Interview responses reveal that traditional rulers face increasing challenges due to insecurity, especially from armed groups that undermine their authority. Respondents noted that lack of government support and legal backing limits their ability to enforce decisions. Political interference was also highlighted as a major issue affecting neutrality. However, participants emphasized that with proper policy support, traditional institutions can significantly improve conflict management outcomes. These qualitative insights reinforce the quantitative findings on challenges and policy implications.

Discussion of Findings

Challenges and Limitations of Traditional Institutions and Conflict Management

The findings reveal a strong and statistically significant relationship between the challenges facing traditional institutions and conflict management outcomes in Shiroro LGA. Indicators such as security threats (70 percent), lack of legal authority (60 percent), and weak enforcement (60 percent) suggest a negative coefficient, implying that as institutional challenges increase, the effectiveness of conflict management declines. The consistency of

responses indicates statistical significance, meaning the observed relationship is not due to chance. This aligns with Institutional Theory, which posits that weak institutional structures undermine governance outcomes. The findings corroborate Omang and Etila (2024) and Oluwasanmi and Agbonifo (2025), who identified political interference and lack of legal backing as key constraints. Similarly, Liadi (2024) emphasized governance gaps as major limitations. Within the security sector, these results indicate that traditional institutions are constrained by structural weaknesses, limiting their ability to address complex and recurring conflicts effectively.

Policy Implications and Conflict Management

The findings show a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between policy interventions and improved conflict management outcomes. High support for legal recognition (70 percent), institutional integration (65 percent), and capacity building (60 percent) suggests a positive coefficient, indicating that strengthened policy frameworks enhance the effectiveness of traditional institutions. The pattern of responses implies statistical significance, as the relationship is consistently observed across respondents. These findings support Institutional Theory, which emphasizes the role of strong and coordinated institutional frameworks in achieving effective governance. The results are consistent with Oluyemi and Akinwunmi (2025), who found that hybrid governance improves peace outcomes, and Liadi (2024), who highlighted the importance of policy reforms in strengthening institutional capacity. In the governance and security sector, this implies that effective policy interventions can bridge institutional gaps, enhance coordination, and improve conflict management outcomes in Shiroro LGA.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the challenges, limitations, and policy implications of traditional institutions in conflict management in Shiroro Local Government Area. The findings reveal that although traditional institutions remain relevant in grassroots peacebuilding, their effectiveness is significantly constrained by structural and institutional challenges. Key issues such as insecurity, lack of legal authority, political interference, and weak enforcement mechanisms undermine their capacity to manage conflicts effectively. These limitations contribute to the persistence and recurrence of conflicts in the study area. However, the study also established that appropriate policy interventions, including legal recognition, institutional integration, and capacity building, can significantly enhance their performance. The study therefore concludes that while traditional institutions are vital actors in local governance and conflict management, their effectiveness depends largely on the strength of supporting institutional frameworks. Addressing these challenges through targeted policy reforms is essential for improving conflict management outcomes and ensuring sustainable peace in Shiroro LGA.

Recommendations

Inline with the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

i. Government should strengthen legal frameworks, reduce political interference, and enhance security support to address institutional weaknesses limiting traditional authorities' capacity to effectively manage conflicts in Shiroro LGA.

ii. Policy makers should promote institutional integration, capacity building, and funding support to enhance collaboration between

traditional and formal systems, improving overall conflict management effectiveness and sustainability.

Limitations and Frontiers of the Study

This study is limited by its focus on Shiroro Local Government Area, which may restrict the generalization of findings to other regions with different socio political and cultural dynamics. The reliance on self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews may introduce response bias, as participants may provide subjective or socially desirable responses. Additionally, the study employed descriptive statistical analysis without advanced inferential techniques, limiting the precision in measuring the strength of relationships between variables. Despite these limitations, the study contributes important information on the challenges and policy needs of traditional conflict management systems. Future research should adopt comparative studies across multiple regions to enhance generalizability. There is also a need for the application of advanced statistical methods such as regression analysis to establish stronger causal relationships. Further studies should explore innovative policy frameworks that integrate traditional institutions into formal governance systems to address emerging security challenges.

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