

Regular Research Paper

The impacts of traditional institution on local government administration in Nigeria: A study of Offa Local Government Area in Kwara State

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The paper examines the impact of traditional institutions on local government administration in Nigeria, with a focus on Offa Local Government in Kwara State. The study aims to reveal the role of traditional institutions in Nigeria's political system using Offa Local Government as a case study. The theoretical framework is based on political participation, and the research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing primary data collected through key informant interviews to ensure objectivity. The core argument of the study is that traditional institutions play a significant and positive role in the political and administrative development of local governments in Nigeria, as demonstrated by the case of Offa Local Government. Despite their contributions, such as enhancing participation, stability, and grassroots governance, the study highlights that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria does not clearly define or recognize the roles of traditional institutions, thereby undermining their effectiveness. The study concludes that constitutional recognition and clearer institutional integration of traditional rulers are essential for strengthening local government administration and promoting sustainable development.

Key words: Traditional Institution, Local Government Administration, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Societies have relied on traditional institutions as a form of governance for many years. By maintaining justice and order in accordance with customary teachings, these institutions have contributed to strengthening the monarchy. European powers, however, considered African civilizations primitive and claimed that African nations had no formal systems of governance prior to colonization. This view has, over the years, been widely criticized as incorrect and overly one-sided (Fatile and Adejuwon, 2010; Ohiole and Ojo, 2015). Prior to coloni-

zation, African societies operated their own indigenous systems of government, rooted in well-developed political, social, and administrative structures. These traditional systems were demonstrated through organized leadership hierarchies, councils of elders, customary laws, community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, and participatory governance practices that ensured order, stability, and collective decision-making. These indigenous institutions functioned effectively long before the introduction of Western colonial state

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structures, showing that African governance was neither primitive nor absent, but coherent, legitimate, and deeply embedded in cultural norms (Garba, et al., 2018).

The strong norms and values embedded in African culture have long supported social safety and stability, forming the foundation upon which every successful society maintains order. For decades before the arrival of the British, traditional institutions and their leaders played central roles in governance and administration across many parts of what is now Africa. Olusola and Aisha (2013) observe that traditional institutions in pre-colonial Nigeria exercised authority, guided behaviour, and maintained dominance largely because societal values were rooted in these cultural norms. Similarly, Suleiman (2023) explains that the king stands at the apex of power within the traditional institution. Although the scope of traditional institutions has expanded beyond the formal roles of traditional rulers in earlier administrative systems, these rulers continue to serve as the principal executive leaders within their domains. The day-to-day administration and enforcement of community laws remain strongly supported by the authority and influence of traditional leaders.

The Hausa-Fulani Emirate has historically been effective due to the efforts of key officials such as the Waziri, the senior chief and adviser to the emir; the Madawaki, commander-in-chief of the armed forces; the Galadima, head of the capital province; and several others, who ensured governance according to Sharia law following the 1804 Jihad War (Ogundare, 2022). In traditional Igbo society, chieftaincy titles guided governance prior to European colonization. The village assembly, along with Ofo titleholders, was responsible for ensuring that the community adhered to customary law, while Ozo chiefs were notable for leading infrastructure and development projects in their communities. Although the traditional roles of kings and chiefs continue to exist in Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution has limited their ability to play a significant role in contemporary politics (Ogundare, 2022).

The roles played by chiefs as advisers, organisers of community defence, and mediators in local conflicts illustrate the enduring relevance of traditional institutions. Citizens generally have a deeper understanding of their own communities' customs, histories, and systems of authority which strengthens their connection to both past and present forms of governance (Amin, 2018). Although these institutions existed long before what is now described as modern democratic practice, many scholars recognise that they have influenced Nigeria's contemporary governance structures. As Umar (2022) notes, elements of Nigeria's traditional customs continue to resonate within the country's present democratic arrangements, showing that traditional and modern systems are not separate opposites but interconnected forms of political organisation.

Even so, the cultural system received limited recognition

during the long period of British rule. Following Nigeria's independence, the emerging representative government gradually replaced the traditional ruling dynasties. Before colonial rule, churches and clans were highly revered and wielded near-sacred authority. However, with the arrival of colonial administration and the introduction of new local government reforms, their influence began to decline (Zik et al., 2023). Traditional rulers from Sokoto, Kano, Katsina, Ilorin, and Ado-Ekiti—including the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti were appointed to provide advisory support at both local and state political levels (Adamu, 2006; Government of Ekiti State, 2025). Traditionally, leadership positions among these rulers rotated, allowing different top-ranking chiefs to serve as chairmen. However, the 1976 and 1979 constitutional reforms, which restructured local administration, ultimately curtailed the political roles and authority of traditional rulers.

Recent literature indicates that traditional leaders play a crucial role in guiding and shaping the work of local governments (Zik et al., 2023), as they operate at the local level, where government is most accessible to the people (Adedayo, 2005; Ojo, 2009; Murana, 2016). Local governments primarily seek to engage citizens in political processes, enabling communities across the state to experience and appreciate the benefits of democracy. Understanding how traditional institutions influence local government administration within Nigeria's democratic system is therefore essential. According to Abdulrahman Abdulrasaki, the governor of Kwara State, the state's traditional leaders have played a significant role in preserving peace since Nigeria's independence (Ajakaye, 2023). Focusing on Offa Local Government, this study examines the ways in which traditional institutions shape the functions and effectiveness of local government administration.

The study examines how commonly held beliefs about traditional institutions are challenged when assessing their impact on local government administration in Offa. Notably, Nigeria's 1999 Constitution does not provide formal recognition or support for traditional institutions. Historically, chiefs are assumed to have served as mediators between the colonial state and local societies, a role they took on after traditional independence was lost with the establishment of the colonial state (Umar, 2022, p.100). While communities often expect their chiefs to act in their best interest, the state may either cooperate with them or withdraw their authority if they fail to comply with state directives.

Political leaders and chiefs often act differently from each other. Traditional rulers sometimes prioritize community goals over their personal interests, demonstrating a willingness to make sacrifices for the well-being of their people (Umar, 2022, p. 100). However, because chiefs depend on state support for their positions and legitimacy, they frequently face challenges in balancing community expectations with state demands

and cannot openly defy the state. In contemporary times, traditional kings are often subjected to ridicule and disrespect within their communities and may fail to promote local development effectively.

Moreover, corruption within both governments and traditional institutions has become more apparent in the Fourth Republic (Suleiman, 2023). Chiefs who align themselves with political agendas often prioritize the interests of politicians over those of their people, reducing their communities' trust and making them more susceptible to corrupt practices (Suleiman, 2023). Empirical evidence from the literature indicates that traditional institutions and leaders can have both positive and negative effects on local government development and community sustainability. Consequently, it remains unclear whether traditional institutions in Kwara State have significantly influenced the growth of local government administration. In response, this study focuses on Offa Local Government as an analytical unit to evaluate the effects of traditional institutions on local government administration in Nigeria.

The broad objective of the study is to assess the Impacts of Traditional institutions on Local government administration in Offa Local Government. The specific objectives are to: 1) Assess the role of traditional institutions before the Fourth Republic in Offa Local Government Administration, 2) Examine the factors that led to sustenance of the traditional institutions' roles in Offa local government, 3) Examine the challenges of the traditional institution in Offa Local Government Administration. And 4) Show how the policy recommendations can be of benefit to the traditional institution in development of Offa Local Government.

Concept of traditional institution

Numerous studies have been conducted on the roles played by traditional institutions in the administration of Nigeria's national, state, and local governments (Ali and Ahmed, 2019; Seriki et al, 2023). The relevant literature that addresses the impact of traditional institutions on local government administration is reviewed in this study. Before colonial intervention, African societies created intricate administrative frameworks designed to uphold social order, regulate communal life through customary norms, and manage disputes across communities and tribal group (Ohiole and Ojo, 2015). According to Mongisteb, in the years before colonization, African societies had firmly established systems for politics, the economy, laws, resources management, dispute settlement and security. People continue to argue over whether traditional leaders should participate in running today's politics.

There are three views shared in 2007 by ECA, pointing out that traditional institutions treated the colonial masters

as partners, were not supporters of democracy and therefore should not be part of an independent post-colonial state (ECA, 2007, p.10). Based on Ejiofor (2004)'s study, a second group argues that political transformation can only happen when traditional institutions are involved. From their perspective, traditional leaders play an important role in helping the African state rebuild because they know its history and culture. Dore (2011) agrees that policy which ignores the past, culture and social context can cause many projects to waste valuable time and money (ECA, 2007, p.11).

The third school (Ejiofo, 2004) makes a middle-of-the-road argument. It admits that these traditional institutions have key resources needed to help democracy and bring rural communities public services but recognizes that they failed in the colonial past. For this reason, Perrot and Fauvelle-Aymar (2003) stated that: "Before independence, it was believed that African (traditional) leaders had a set fate; they were routinely blamed for working only for the colonizers and were always seen as looking to the past." Even though the traditional institution is old, its influence over the executive is declining in Africa, spanning the colonial era to the first years of African independence. In some areas of Nigeria, traditional rulers provide a vital link between the people and the government, facilitating communication for community welfare and survival. However, this role is less significant in other regions. This study closely examines the effects of traditional institutions in Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State Figure 1.

Local government administration

Regardless of the civilization, the value of local government administration remains high. Understanding local government can be challenging, particularly when the people do not perceive its positive impact (Murana, 2016). To fully grasp local government administration, it is important first to understand administration in general. Administration involves combining, coordinating, and processing various activities carried out by multiple individuals to achieve specific objectives (Oke, 2004). It is an approach designed to produce the desired outcomes. Nwosu (1985) emphasized that administration is essential whenever several people must work together to complete a common task (Oke, 2004). To achieve organizational goals, administration relies on effectively integrating available resources with human skills (Olaleye, 2010; Ogundare, 2021).

As a result, administration enables local governments to deliver essential services designed to meet the needs and demands of the people, improve their standard of living, and manage key executive functions for residents within a specific district or locality. According to Chadwick (1990, p. 65), local government is recognized for its role in community development and providing residents with



Figure 1. Map location of Offa local government area. This indication location Map of the analyze area in the study in particular to Offa Local government in Kwara State.

Source: Google map edited by Authors (2025).

access to social services. Oke (2004) emphasized that the primary purpose of local government is to address the needs of the people within a given locality. Enhancing the effectiveness of local government and achieving better outcomes through elected officials is central to local government administration. Furthermore, the United Nations Office for Public Administration, cited in Ola and Tonwe (2009, as referenced in Aliyu et al., 2019), defines local government as “a political division within a state or nation that is formed by law and manages its affairs, including setting taxes or directing labor,” highlighting its vital role in service delivery and meeting the everyday needs of communities. Due to the significant distance between cities and rural villages, local authorities are often required to provide services that federal and state governments struggle to deliver. These services are essential to community development (Uhunmwangho and Epelle, 2008, as cited in Amin, 2018). The willingness and active participation of local residents lie at the heart of effective local government, and this community engagement is what drives meaningful progress.

In addition, local governments are responsible for establishing and maintaining basic community facilities such as bicycles and non-mechanically propelled trucks, wheels, canoes and carts, slaughterhouses and slaughter slabs, motor parks, public conveniences, markets, roads, streets, street lighting, parks, drains, and other public highways. Their functions also include naming roads and streets, maintaining public conveniences, assigning

house numbers, managing waste and sewage disposal, registering births, marriages, and deaths, and rating private houses or tenements, all in accordance with the state’s House of Assembly (Fourth Schedule of the 1999 Constitution: Amin, 2018). Local government administration, therefore, plays a vital and irreplaceable role in promoting development and improving the quality of life within communities in Nigeria, as illustrated by the case of Offa Local Government.

The roles of traditional institutions in Nigeria's democratic governance

It is difficult to overstate the significance of traditional institutions in Nigeria’s governance and democratic development. These institutions historically played central roles in administration, security, and community progress, both before and during the colonial period. In pre-colonial Nigeria, governance structures varied, with some regions exhibiting centralized authority while others operated through decentralized systems (Erero, 2005; Oguntomisin, 1996; Fatile and Adejuwon, 2010; Ohiole and Ojo, 2015; Mamman and Abdullahi, 2018). During the colonial era, traditional rulers were formally empowered through legislation such as the Native Authority Ordinance of 1916, which recognized chiefs as administrative heads under indirect rule, the Native Courts Ordinance of 1933, which allowed them to preside over customary courts, and the revised Native Authority

Ordinance of 1954, which clarified their powers in local administration, taxation, and security. Despite this legal empowerment, the population and local rulers remained subordinate to the colonial administration, which maintained ultimate authority (Adesoji, 2010; Abdullahi, 2007).

Following independence, the role of traditional institutions was gradually diminished. The Local Government Reforms of 1976 retained traditional rulers as advisory figures but stripped them of executive powers, a marginalisation reinforced by subsequent constitutions, including the 1979 Constitution, which provided for councils of chiefs at the state level, and the 1999 Constitution, which left traditional authorities with only ceremonial and advisory roles (Fajonyomi, 2010). Consequently, while traditional institutions continue to influence community governance and social cohesion, their formal political authority has been largely curtailed, highlighting the tension between historical legitimacy and modern constitutional frameworks.

Challenges facing traditional institutions in Nigeria

There are various causes, continuing today, that have reduced the ability of traditional rulers to steer state affairs. As Fatale (2010) notes, some of these problems are intentionally established, but others are caused by traditional organizations themselves. Many problems facing traditional institutions arise from a failure to follow due process. In some cases, only members of royal families are eligible to be crowned as traditional rulers, contrary to the appointment methods historically established (Fajonyomi, 1997). In Nigeria, traditional institutions have, at times, lost the respect of their communities due to instances of corruption and misconduct, undermining their authority and eroding their role as paternal and moral guides (Garba et al., 2018). Today, some traditional rulers engage with government institutions primarily to seek business contracts and political recognition (Garba et al., 2018). To gain government support, they attend political rallies or enter politics themselves, and those who resist political pressures often face sanctions that hinder the development of their communities. In addition, traditional title holders compete with one another for seniority. The dispute between the Ooni of Ife and the Alaafin of Oyo over seniority within the Yoruba nation is a notable example of internal strife (The Nation, 2011). Leaders of traditional societies sometimes join political parties to support individuals they believe will help them assert dominance over their rivals. While performing their royal duties, they are expected to be impartial, but in practice, fairness is often compromised (Garba et al., 2018; Ohialo and Ojo, 2015).

Beyond issues of corruption, traditional rulers face a range of structural and institutional challenges that have weakened their authority and effectiveness. There is no

clear constitutional framework defining their powers, and they often contend with unfavorable working conditions, limited respect or recognition, inadequate government support, and high public expectations (Garba et al., 2018).

The political system generally offers little support for conventional rulers. Historically, control over land was a significant source of their power and wealth, but the Land Use Decree of 1978 transferred land administration to the State government, reducing the economic influence of traditional kings (Garba et al., 2018; Ohialo and Ojo, 2015; Ambali et al., 2021). In 1984, legislation allocated traditional rulers five percent of local government funding, supplemented by monthly stipends from the state government (Erero, 2005). However, in practice, many local governments either refuse to disburse this allocation or do so only when pressured by higher levels of government, significantly undermining the intended support system (Fatile, 2010).

Traditional institution prospects in Nigeria

Despite the gradual erosion of their formal powers in Nigeria's representative administration, traditional rulers continue to be regarded as important actors in certain administrative and governance functions. They remain the custodians of culture and tradition, responsible for preserving the heritage of the land and, when necessary, restoring its reputation (Ohialo and Ojo, 2015). In this capacity, they often act as mediators and bridges between the government and local communities. Their political relevance is evident in historical instances: during General Abacha's regime, traditional rulers were courted to support plans for his succession, while the Obasanjo administration sought their backing for his proposed third-term agenda (Umar, 2022; Ohialo and Ojo, 2015). Similarly, during President Jonathan's tenure, he and his wife, Patience, were formally received by Oba Okunade Sijuwade, the Ooni of Ile-Ife, as the Ohun Orun and Yeyeohun Orun of the Source, respectively, during celebrations marking the monarch's 30th year on the throne. This event highlights how traditional rulers continue to be engaged by political leaders to consolidate support. At the time, the president expressed regret that traditional institutions had not been given a significant role in shaping democratic governance in the nation. He further argued that traditional rulers, as fathers of all, should be assigned clearly defined roles in the Constitution (Fatale, 2010).

The statement highlights the enduring relevance of traditional rulers in local governance, particularly in conflict resolution and the management of culturally rooted disputes. Traditional authorities are uniquely positioned to mediate conflicts between politicians and resolve land disputes because they possess both legitimacy and social recognition within their communities. Unlike formal administrative or executive

institutions, which often rely on bureaucratic procedures and legal frameworks, traditional rulers can address issues that emerge from cultural practices and social norms, making them indispensable in maintaining social cohesion. This is especially significant in areas where cultural disasters or vices give rise to disputes that cannot be effectively managed through formal governance mechanisms. Furthermore, the argument underscores that the institution of traditional governance serves a socializing function in society that is unmatched by other institutions, with the notable exception of the family. By transmitting and enforcing cultural norms, traditional rulers help sustain societal values, even amid processes of modernization and colonial disruption. African culture, as Umar (2022) observes, has proven resilient; despite the influence of colonial modernization, cultural values have persisted largely due to the stabilizing role of traditional institutions. In this context, the continued engagement of traditional rulers in local conflict resolution and cultural governance is not merely ceremonial but constitutes a critical mechanism through which communities maintain social order and cultural continuity.

Traditional rulers continue to hold significant potential for influencing the political process. According to UNECA (2007), their roles can be classified into three main areas: conflict management, developmental functions, and advisory responsibilities. At both federal and state levels, they often serve as key advisors to government authorities. A clear illustration of this was observed in Lagos State, where traditional rulers actively supported the government during the establishment of 37 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs). In July 2009, they issued a "19-point communiqué" endorsing the creation of the LCDAs and advising President Yar'Adua to pursue legal remedies if any actions contravened existing laws, demonstrating their active engagement in governance and policy matters (Fatile, 2010).

By assisting the government in mobilizing funds and resources and educating their populace about government health initiatives such as vaccination and HIV/AIDS campaigns, population surveys, and voter registration, traditional leaders contribute to the development of their country. When President Jonathan stated: "Now is the time for traditional rulers to speak to their subjects on the need to come out for the forthcoming voter registration so that during elections, the people can choose their leaders," he acknowledged and validated this important role (Ohialo and Ojo, 2015). Traditional rulers have consistently shown their value through the way they handle disputes, serving as trusted mediators who resolve conflicts and restore harmony within their communities. Traditional rulers still play a significant role, even though the Land Use Act gives state governors the authority to use land. In situations where misunderstandings arise due to a communication breakdown, they also serve as mediators between the people and the government.

The impacts of traditional institutions in Kwara State: Discursive exploration of Offa local government

The democratic process of the polity places great importance on the crucial responsibilities that traditional institutions play in effectively influencing community development and maintaining peace in Kwara State (Ajakaye, 2023). As one of Kwara State's constituent entities, Offa local government has demonstrated the usefulness of traditional institutions in protecting the community's territorial integrity from the neighboring community (Erinle). This has improved the management of the Offa Local Government. Offa maintains its claim to the territory since it was the first Ibolospeaking town established in the region by Olofagangan, a descendant of Oduduwa.

In historical practice, traditional rulers in the Offa region exercised considerable authority over land allocation, a key instrument of social and economic control. They leased parcels of land to nearby towns and settlements in exchange for an annual payment known as Isakole, which was traditionally paid during the Onimeka festival. This practice was later influenced by similar customs from Ile-Ife and Oyo, reflecting the transmission and adaptation of cultural governance across Yoruba communities (Alao et al., 2019; Ojelahi et al., 2021). Several monarchs including the Oloponda of Oponda, Bale of Asapate, Akosin of Ekosin, Onijagbo of Ijagbo, Onipee of Ipee, Onira of Ira, and Bale of Ilemona were historically granted pieces of land to administer and allocate, illustrating the broad authority traditional rulers held over local resources (Salawu, 2006).

A notable example is the establishment of the Erin-Ile community, reportedly facilitated by the sixth Olofa of Offa, who allocated land for settlement, demonstrating how traditional authority directly shaped local spatial and social organization. Geographically, the area was demarcated by natural boundaries, including the Oluwo stream along Offa Road, the Awora stream on the left, and a pathway leading to Ilemona on the right. Empirical evidence suggests that the creation of the Offa Local Government Area was made possible through the combined efforts of the Oyun Local Government, traditional rulers, and influential community members, highlighting the institutional role of monarchs in local governance (Alao et al., 2019).

Theoretical framework: Political participatory theory

Political participation theory (Sapru, 2008) is the primary theoretical framework for this study, although other theories, such as the internalization of system theory and structural functionalism, are also relevant. Structural functionalism emphasizes the need for a balance of power and the maintenance of peace in the state, considering the function of each component; however, it does not address the conditions necessary for each

component or institution to exist. Systems theory highlights the interdependence of each unit (input), emphasizing that the failure of one part can affect the entire system.

This study aligns best with political participation theory, as it emphasizes the importance of an inclusive political structure and process that unites social forces, making them central to the democratic process. Through their participation, contributions, and involvement in governance, traditional rulers play a crucial role in sustaining democratic systems (Umar, 2022). The theory is predicated on the following assumptions: 1) The political participatory theory elevates the democratic process from the national to the local level. 2) It requires all state institutions to actively participate in the state's democratic process; and 3) It involves traditional institutions in goal setting and decision-making at both the state and local levels.

It is impossible to overlook this theory's limitations; executives and other political actors at all levels may not consider the advising role that some institutions' political participation plays. However, by offering a plan for strengthening traditional institutions in the Offa Local Government region, this research will address the theory's shortcomings and maintain its credibility.

The application of the theories

The applicability of political participation theory to this study lies in its ability to explain the effects of traditional institutions on local government politics and community development through the active involvement of traditional rulers and their institutions in Offa Local Government Administration. This perspective justifies the study, *The Impact of Traditional Institutions on Local Government Administration in Nigeria: A Study of Offa Local Government in Kwara State*. In other words, the contributions of traditional institutions to the development and effectiveness of local government administration cannot be overlooked.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey design was employed in this investigation. As a case study of Offa Local Government administration, the methodology involved key informant interviews to gather data on the effects of traditional institutions on local government administration. Specifically, the study focused on respondents' perspectives regarding the influence of traditional institutions, rulers, and chiefs within Offa Local Government. The impact of these traditional institutions on the management of Offa's local government was analyzed using descriptive techniques. The results were presented and discussed thematically. Additionally, textual analysis of secondary materials from reliable sources related to the research topic was conducted to complement and strengthen the primary data analysis.

Historical overview of Offa

Offa is in Nigeria's Northern Central zone, approximately

between latitudes 8° 68'N and 8°12' N and longitudes 4° 40' E and 4°47' E. It shares borders with Ajase-Ipo to the north, Ojoku, Igbonna, and Ikotun to the west, Igosun and Ipee to the east, Erin Ile to the south, and Ilemona to the southwest. Ilorin, the state capital, is around 56 kilometers away, and Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, is about 59 kilometers away (Mohammed, 2021). With an aerial area of about 227.39 km², Offa is the state's second-largest town and a middle-sized urban center. It is also home to the local government's headquarters, which was created in 1991 Figure 2. It is among the most well-liked towns in terms of politics and education, with a growth rate of 5%, which is far higher than that of other Nigerian cities. Additionally, it is among Nigeria's fastest-growing urban hubs (Mohammed, 2021). The Nigerian Navy School of Health Science, Federal Polytechnic, College of Health Technology, Summit University, College of Education, School of Basic and Remedial Studies, Lens Polytechnic, and Graceland Polytechnics are among the public and private tertiary institutions that are fortunately located in Offa.

Several literary and mythological historical studies have been conducted on Offa Township. One of the historical stories states that Offa town honored the previous Oyo monarchy because it was a satellite of that kingdom. The Northwest battles later led to Ilorin's victory over Offa, and Ilorin took control of Offa. Some sources claim that the Ilorin forces killed and massacred the local inhabitants like animals, while the northern forces damaged Offa (Alao, 2019). Military rule forced people to leave Offa, and nearby communities like Ofatedo, Ilofa, and Oke-Offa in Ibadan were built in its stead.

Another tradition claims that Oranmiyan's wife, Moremi, was from Offa. Obalufon, who was watching over the palace for Arole (Oranmiyan), ran away from the palace when Oranmiyan and his wife, Moremi, left Bini to travel to Ile-Ife, fearing that Oranmiyan would murder him. However, a recorded series of invasions on Offa by the Nupe army, led by their famous warrior Majia, occurred during the reigns of Olofa Oluwole (1526–1567) and Okunmolu (1567–1624), respectively. The persistence of the Nupe invasions, which continued for about 50 years, forced the Offa people to move at regular intervals during this period. They even established Ilofa, Ofatedo, and Oke-Offa, among others.

Furthermore, it is believed that the Offa people have lived in Oke-Offa, a large area of Ibadan, since the 1800s (Banwo, 2002). "Ijakadi loro OffaOffa" is Offa's laudatory nickname since one of the Ibolo-speaking communities claims the land as the first Ibolo-speaking town in the area, founded by Olofagangan, an Oduduwa descendent. The "Isakole" custom, which was transferred from Ile-Ife and Oyo to his successors, allowed them to lease land sections to neighboring cities and villages in exchange for an annual payment known as Isakole, which was given during the Onimeka festival (Alao et al, 2019, Ojelahi et al., 2021).

Salawu (2006) states that among the kings who received



Figure 2. Offa and surrounding towns and villages
Source. Google location edited by Authors (2025).

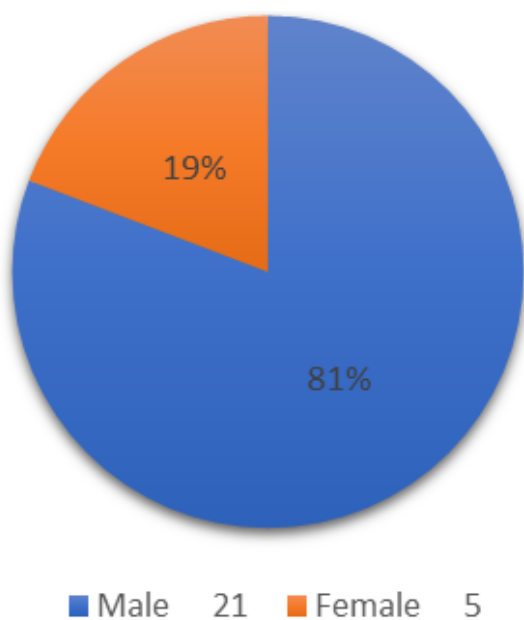


Figure 3. Percentage of sex distribution.

land pieces were the Oloponda of Oponda, Bale of Asapate, Akosin of Ekosin, Onijagbo of Ijagbo, Onipee of Ipee, Onira of Ira, and Bale of Ilemona. As a result, it is said that ElerinArebiope received the land where Erin-Ile is currently from the sixth Olofa of Offa, enabling the Erin-Ile people to settle there. According to reports, this region's boundaries include the Oluwo stream on Offa Road, the Awora stream on the left, and a walkway

leading to Ilemona on the right (Salawu, 2006).

Adeeye (1992) claims that when the Oyun division was created as a political or administrative body in Kwara State, Offa was chosen as the headquarters. This gave Offa the advantage of witnessing its local government in 1991 undergo a dramatic increase in both population and size within the traditional core areas, as well as a dramatic invasion of agricultural lands in the suburbs or outskirts (Mohammed, 2015; Mohammed, 2021). In contrast, Offa township is divided into five districts, which collectively make up the five villages in the local government areas of Asalofa, Balogun, Ojomu, Shawo, and Essa. In the Offa township traditional ruling council, a sizable chunk of Olofa is represented by these chiefs.

Offa Local Government in perspective

In 1991, the new Offa Local Government was created by dividing the old Oyun Local Government Area. Since 1991, the executive administration of the local government area has had 19 chairmen. These chairmen have contributed to the growth of the local government area in the areas of social investment, community development, security, and infrastructure development for the Offa local government.

Figure 3 shows that there are 21 male respondents (81%), and 5 female respondents (19%) for the key informant interview on the study. Figure 4 shows the respondents' demographic distribution, including the gender distribution. Male respondents out-numbered females in the study (80.8%, n = 21 vs. 19.2%, n = 5).

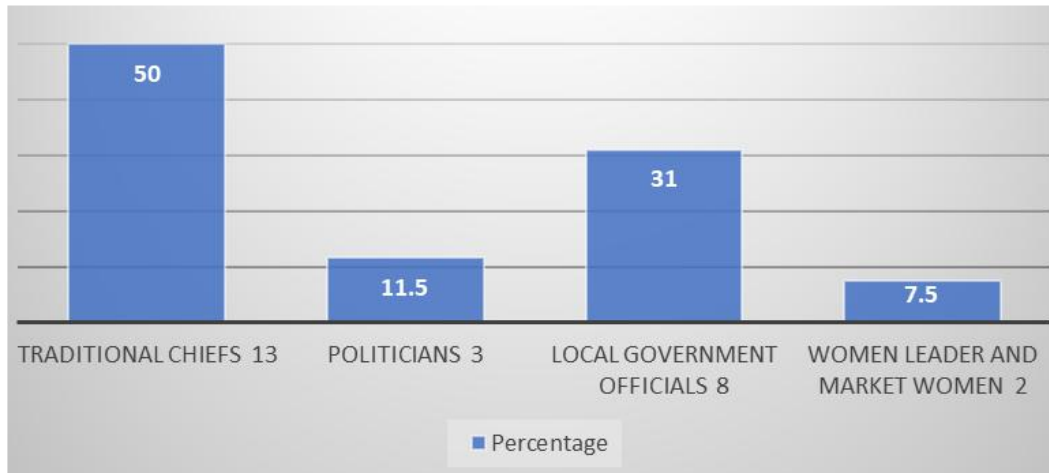


Figure 4. Percentage of occupation distribution.

The reason for the unequal gender distribution was the fearful behavior exhibited by the female respondents throughout the in-depth interviews for this study. Male respondents in Offa communities were more likely to participate in the interview than their female counterparts. Nonetheless, the researcher and his assistant thought the research distribution was suitable for examination. The components of the interview include two (7.5%) market women and women leaders, eight (31%), three (15%) politicians, and thirteen (50%) traditional rulers.

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Objective 1: Examine the impacts of the traditional institutions in Offa Local Government

The significant contributions of traditional institutions to the development of Offa Local Government cannot be overstated. Participants in the in-depth interviews emphasized that the Offa traditional institution has had a notable impact on development, security, and advisory services within the local government area. Beyond the official administrative roles of local government executives, the traditional institution has helped to mitigate poverty by providing food and financial support to the elderly and less privileged members of the community. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the king and chiefs distributed palliative food and monetary assistance to vulnerable residents.

Female respondents highlighted the critical role of the king and the Offa traditional ruling council in market development, noting their guidance and mediation of conflicts among market women leaders in Owode and other commercial hubs within Offa Local Government. They also confirmed that women's contributions to local development are acknowledged and supported by the customary ruling council. A different respondent, a chief

and former chairman of Offa Local Government, emphasized that residents in Offa maintain stronger allegiance to the traditional institution than to the executive chairman or other government officials, underscoring the enduring influence of traditional rulers on local governance and community growth.

One respondent attested that the traditional institution has been crucial in resolving conflicts between the people in the communities, particularly those involving land issues, and that it is essential to the establishment of development projects and programs aimed at the advancement of the Offa people. One respondent also stated that the king and the traditional institution council were generally doing their best to meet the needs of humanity in their limited capacity, even though the government and the 1999 constitution had ignored the role of the traditional rulers in the administration of the local setting.

At the local government level in Offa during the Fourth Republic, another political figure observed that the traditional institution serves as a mechanism for directly serving the people. It functions not only as a conduit for communication between the populace and government but also as a mediator in political crises or policy challenges at the local government level. Because the king's paternal role is highly respected compared to local government politicians, the traditional institution remains an influential and trusted force among the people. It addresses issues that local government officials and politicians may be unable to resolve.

This beneficial influence has contributed to the development of the Offa local government region. The critical role of the traditional ruling council in local development was further illustrated by a distinguished local government official, who confirmed that the "Offa Metropolitan Club for Offa Development" is significantly guided by the traditional ruling house. This progressive collaboration has also supported the advancement of

education in the Offa Local Government Area, as former secondary school students have transformed ancient institutions into modern educational establishments.

Offa Tuntun is another initiative of King "Olofa," where the descendants of Offa are dedicated to a development effort to create Offa a unique and extraordinary location in Kwara State. The Offa Local Government Area has benefited greatly from the king's charismatic personality. The growth of Offa also greatly benefits from the traditional institutions' function as consultants to the local government council.

One respondent highlighted that the monarch's initiatives through the "Offa Metropolitan Club" and "Offa Tuntun" were aimed at planning infrastructure and development to ensure human security in the local government area. The establishment of Summit University is recognized as a significant achievement contributing to the growth of the local government region, alongside other developments such as the Federal Polytechnic Offa, and the construction of a new library and town hall achievements attributed to the guidance and counsel of the traditional institution. The Offa traditional ruler encouraged all descendants of Offa to leverage their appointments or political positions to advance local government initiatives, thereby supporting community development efforts.

The respondent also emphasized the notable contributions of the Oyeleke Family in constructing the 11-kilometer Offa-Ogbonna Road, considered one of the best roads in Offa. The growth of cultural heritage and education is further exemplified by the establishment of Offa Grammar School, made possible through the contributions of prominent Offa families, including the Olatinwo, Ijaya, and Bilewu families. Additionally, the respondent confirmed the king's active role in maintaining security, such as preventing conflicts between farmers and herders, which has contributed to Offa's peaceful environment.

The traditional council has played a pivotal role in the local government's security framework, which comprises the king and five high chiefs representing Offa's five districts. The committee also includes Fulanis, army and navy officials, senior police officers, and local vigilantes. Working closely with community vigilantes, the security committee has been instrumental in apprehending hardened offenders and resolving conflicts, such as the farmers-herdsmen dispute in Offa.

One high chief highlighted that the traditional ruling council has preserved the cultural heritage of Offa Township, which has positively influenced the growth of the local government. The adage "Alale Offa oda o|" — meaning the ancestor of Offa intercedes in all events, whether good or evil — reinforces the strength of the town's cultural heritage. This respect for tradition encourages Offa descendants to prioritize community development while upholding cultural values. The king leverages this principle to guide politicians and their

successors toward the advancement of local governance and to mitigate conflicts among political actors.

Another respondent emphasized that the traditional institution fosters a strong collaborative relationship between the king and executive chairmen in Offa Local Government, which is crucial for effective governance. The Olofa traditional ruling council, composed of the king and his chiefs from various communities, has facilitated strategic policymaking by providing pre-formed public opinion for local government officials. The monarch's fatherly influence over politicians has remained significant since the beginning of the Fourth Republic.

Prominent female respondents underscored the king's unique role as a servant and advocate for women in local administration. They agreed that the king is more accessible to women than the local government chairman, citing his financial support and facilitation in building the model market and renovating Owode Market. The monarch also ensures that the perspectives of marginalized and illiterate community members are acknowledged.

A critical function of the traditional institution is the resolution of land disputes, such as those between the Offa and Ijagbo communities, fostering peace and brotherhood between neighboring local government areas like Oyun and Offa. Respondents noted the council's significant involvement in settling community disputes, mediating market women's leadership struggles for the Iyaloja chieftaincy, and supporting women's economic empowerment through the Offa Descendants Union's philanthropic initiatives. The traditional ruling council has been instrumental in maintaining peace and stability in Offa Local Government. The king's cultural authority and dignity, supported by the community's reverence for tradition, reinforce respect for the institution and ensure the sustained observance of local norms and governance values.

Another prominent female leader expressed her gratitude to the Olofa, the king, for his initiative and financial support during the recent fire disaster at Owode Market in Offa Local Government. She also appealed to wealthy residents, both within Offa and abroad, to contribute to the market's reconstruction and rehabilitation. She emphasized that the interaction between traditional institutions and the government has been critical in sustaining the market, and that the contributions of traditional leaders to the development of Offa Local Government cannot be overlooked.

Another female respondent highlighted the economic influence of the traditional ruler, noting that the king played a central role in ensuring human security during the COVID-19 pandemic. He provided food and financial assistance to community members, supported by contributions from wealthy Offa residents both locally and internationally. She stressed that the traditional ruling council's efforts during the pandemic and periods of economic hardship were vital to the welfare of the

community.

A political analyst observed that, despite not having explicitly defined constitutional powers under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, the traditional ruler of Offa Local Government plays an essential conventional role in local development. He noted that local government administration in Kwara State is limited because caretaker chairmen are appointed by the state government rather than elected by the people. Consequently, the local government executive is more accountable to the state than to the citizens, summarized by the adage, “he who blows the pipe dictates the tune.” In this context, the traditional ruling council acts as a mediator between the community and the local government, while also serving as an adviser to the local government executive. However, constitutional constraints limit the full political potential of the traditional institution.

One respondent emphasized that the traditional council exerts significant influence as servant leaders because they maintain close care and oversight of the communities. They guide politicians by organizing public education and awareness on the platforms and campaigns of local political parties, helping citizens make informed choices. Unfortunately, many politicians tend to neglect or abandon the guidance of the traditional institution once elected.

Nonetheless, the peace, stability, and development of Offa Local Government are strengthened by the traditional institution’s role as guardians of the community’s revered cultural dignity. Lawmakers and local executives often rely on the platform of conventional institutions to understand public opinion and the priorities needed for effective local governance.

Through the hiring of private security guards by the chiefs in the five communities of Offa local government, a major traditional respondent stated that the traditional ruler has been instrumental in ensuring the safety of people’s lives and property in Offa villages. Other duties include mediating conflicts between the Offa people and the council administration, serving as the political father of all politicians in Offa villages, and resolving disputes over land and domestic matters in the king’s court.

The traditional rulers are more relevant to the populace and closer to them, especially the illiterate segment of society. The elderly population in the communities looks on the traditional ruler for assistance at various times since they are more accessible to them. According to these responses, the monarch responds to the people’s interests and expressions more than the chairman of the Offa Local Government region. This is one of the eminent contributions of the king to the Local Government Area.

Since many uneducated members of the community have closer ties to the king and prominent Offa chiefs than to the local government executive, several interviewees emphasized that direct cooperation between the local government executive and the traditional rulers

is essential for the effective performance of the executive chairman. Because the king and the traditional ruling council are more familiar with the community’s issues and challenges than the local government executive, the chairman’s success largely depends on their counsel and perspective.

The influence of the traditional monarch on the development of Offa local administration cannot be overstated. The use of caretaker governments at the local level during the 2019–2024 administration in Kwara State—where the state government appointed local representatives rather than allowing citizens to elect them—has led to a reduced sense of participation and belonging among the populace. According to respondents, this situation has further enhanced the popularity and significance of King Olofa, who has been able to prioritize the welfare and survival of the people in Offa town. The significance of traditional institutions in the growth of local government administration has been made clear by recent political events in Kwara State, especially in the Offa local government region, where the king is easier to reach than the local government executive.

One respondent emphasized how traditional rulers in Offa local government had benefited the growth of local government administration. These include the organization of town meetings for the general development of Offa Township, the development of the market community, the preservation of culture and tradition, and the maintenance of security (Vigilante and Neighborhood Watch), which uses two cars and five motorcycles for security patrols in five communities of Offa Local Government. This interview opinion of the respondent agrees with Oyekola (2024) on the impact of vigilante group in Kwara State.

Objective 2: Examine the factors that led to sustenance of the traditional institutions’ roles in Offa local government

According to a well-known respondent, traditional institutions would be able to carry out their duties in the development of the Offa Local Government region if they receive sufficient money at the local government level.

Another respondent stated that local security should be managed by the conventional institutions at the local government level. Their closeness to the public, particularly the local police, is the cause of this. The respondent analysis and Ogundare (2024)’s submission on vigilante groups and local policing in Kwara State aligned. Some of these respondents agreed that a cordial connection between the traditional institution and the local government’s executive powers is essential to the institution’s survival and the development of the Offa local government region.

Objective 3: Examine the challenges of the traditional institution in Offa Local Government Administration

One respondent asserted that the 1976 Nigerian Local Government Reform repaired the traditional rulers' bad reputation and that colonization had snatched away the traditional institution's power, which was crucial to pre-colonial governance. The 1999 constitution's lack of protections for traditional institutions has a significant negative impact on the councils of traditional institutions and the dynasty of cultural heritage. Even if the 1999 constitution does not recognize the role of traditional rulers in local government management, the 5% allocation to the traditional institution was not justified because it is not arriving as promised or on time.

However, the respondents are dissatisfied that the traditional institution function is ignored in the 1999 Nigerian constitution. In a way, this undermines the political dynasty of the traditional cultural heritage by making the local government more approachable by the people.

Another respondent emphasized that the interview segment highlighted the shortcomings of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution, which bars traditional institutions and rulers from formal political involvement. This limitation negatively affects the development of local government areas and undermines the valuable role that traditional institutions play in local governance. While the contributions of the ruling house in the Offa Local Government area remain significant, more effort is needed to address the constitutional constraints that render traditional institutions politically marginalized—an issue from which Offa Local Government is not exempt. Several respondents further noted that traditional ruling councils are losing respect in the Fourth Republic due to the 1999 Constitution's failure to recognize traditional institutions. Despite this, the advisory role of these councils in local government administration remains critical. According to the interviewees, local government chairmen are often more accountable to the state governor than to the local populace, reflecting a constitutional flaw in which local governments, though formally designated as the third tier of governance, remain under state control.

The artificial independence of local government has not fostered a cordial relationship between Olofa and the executive chairman of the local government because the king is closer to the people and the traditional ruling council has access to information about the people and potential development needs in Offa. Unfortunately, because the local government's executive is beholden to the state government rather than its residents, the 1976 local government reformation's purpose has been defeated. Traditional institutions contribute very little to the expansion of local government in the Offa Local Government Area due to the limitations of the 1999 constitution and the political strategy of Kwara state.

The respondent asserted that the often-cited allocation of 5% of the local government administration budget to the traditional institution council in Kwara State is largely a myth. In practice, the traditional rulers have been unable to fulfill many of their human security duties in Offa Local Government, particularly under the current All Progressives Congress (APC) administration, which inherited an economic crisis from the previous government. Although promised, a corrective measure has yet to be implemented.

Several respondents noted that corruption and poor management among political leaders in the local government area have had a minor negative impact on local development, which indirectly affects the traditional institution's ability to contribute effectively. The limited funding to the traditional council in Offa has been a major constraint. High-ranking chiefs expressed dissatisfaction with the relationship between Offa's local government administration and traditional institutions since the Fourth Republic began in 1999. They argued that while the 1999 Constitution effectively marginalized traditional institutions in local governance, the 1976 local government reforms had previously restored some authority and faith in these institutions. Offa serves as a prominent example where the constitutional neglect has prevented traditional rulers from fully realizing their potential.

The 5% budget allocation to the council of traditional institutions is often not made available, leaving traditional institutions and dependent populations underfunded. This aligns with the analysis by Igbokwe-Ibeto and Ogbuagu (2021) regarding the role of traditional institutions in curbing insecurity in Nigeria. Furthermore, the caretaker government system prioritizes state government interests over local needs, slowing the development of Offa local government and limiting the productive roles of traditional rulers. While some traditional leaders in Nigerian politics become involved in partisan politics and corruption, Offa's traditional institutions remain largely distinct and free from corruption, with the monarch and chiefs regarded as respected societal figures.

The study concluded that conventional institutions in Offa Local Government have played a significant role in local administration and development. The traditional ruling council wields considerable influence due to its accessibility and trust among the populace, particularly the elderly, who often view the council as their primary source of support. Traditional rulers also act as political fathers to local politicians, bridging the gap between government and the people through public sensitization and community mobilization. This unique role contributes significantly to community development.

However, the excessive political involvement of some traditional leaders, such as lobbying for contracts, can undermine their moral authority and fatherly role, occasionally diminishing public respect for traditional institutions. The study highlights that, while the traditional

institution's contributions are indispensable, the constitutional limitations imposed by the 1999 Nigerian Constitution remain a major weakness.

The introduction of caretaker governments under the recent APC administration in Kwara State further complicated matters. The interim chairman, appointed rather than elected, is accountable to the state government rather than the local populace, weakening community integration and participation. Residents now feel less connected to local governance, underscoring the urgent need for constitutional reforms to empower traditional institutions and strengthen local government administration.

Conclusion

The study shows how the development of Offa Local Government has been aided by traditional institutions. The Offa Local Government Area and all of its communities are unique and fast because of the traditional rulers' evaluation and general review. The traditional institution of the Offa Local Government has done many commendable things and contributed significantly to the development of Offa Township since the beginning of the Fourth Republic. It is important to note that the Offa descendants who have contributed to the traditional institution have helped Offa communities in the Offa Local Government Area grow economically and educationally.

To understand the areas that need improvement, people and organizations in Offa get closer to the monarch in every aspect. According to the survey, the Oba (the King) usually grants admission to the Offa Local Government Area, which is a positive trend. The people have had easier access to the king and Offa's traditional ruling council than to the government since the caretaker chairman was appointed in 2020–2024. Most senior citizens take their complaints to more reputable organizations rather than the chairman of the local government. The illiterate members of the community view the monarch as the most significant citizen and the best opportunity for the people in Offa Local Government Area. However, the traditional institution's capacity to contribute to local government development in Offa is progressing at an arithmetic rather than geometric rate due to constitutional constraints. Under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, traditional rulers are rendered largely irrelevant in the contemporary political framework. Offa Local Government exemplifies how the administrative structure limits the potential of traditional leaders to advance their communities, as they are often perceived merely as political actors without clearly defined responsibilities.

The traditional allocation of 5% of the local government budget has largely become a myth, as the traditional institutions in Offa have been unable to fully perform their

humanitarian and developmental duties. The caretaker administration, lacking local legitimacy and authority, has made the creation and effective functioning of Offa Local Government more challenging. Consequently, the relationship between the local government executive and the traditional ruling council is often strained and ineffective.

Other systemic challenges affecting local government development in Offa mirror broader issues in Kwara State and Nigeria. Local governments are heavily dependent on the state government, undermining the autonomy envisioned for the third tier of government. Additional constraints include inadequate funding, excessive political involvement of traditional institutions in state politics, poor staff training, insufficient equipment, mismanagement of local government funds, and pervasive corruption among state and local political leaders. The state executive wields disproportionate power over local government affairs, further restricting development.

These challenges impede the growth of local government administration in Offa and limit the effectiveness of traditional institutions in supporting community development. This study emphasizes that Offa Local Government, and Kwara State more broadly, require both adequate financial appropriation and the political will to empower local governance. Strengthening traditional institutions and recognizing their role is essential to achieving sustainable growth and development at the local government level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study addressed the question of how traditional institutions influence local government administration through a case study of the Offa Local Government area. The findings indicate that traditional institutions in Offa have played a significant role in local government development. However, the growth and effectiveness of the local government have been constrained by several factors, including the 1999 Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution's failure to recognize the roles of traditional institutions, inadequate funding, corruption and embezzlement at the local government level, and the excessive political involvement of some chiefs and traditional rulers.

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening Collaboration: At the local government level, there must be effective collaboration between traditional institutions and the executive. This partnership will enable the executive to better understand community needs and bring government closer to the people, as traditional institutions are often the most accessible and reliable channels for assessing local demands.

2. Constitutional Reforms: The Federal Republic of Nigeria should revise the 1999 Constitution to formally integrate traditional institutions into the local government political process in a meaningful advisory capacity, rather than limiting them to mere ceremonial roles. This integration should ensure that traditional rulers and chiefs retain their paternal responsibilities without encouraging active political careers, thereby preserving the long-term sustainability and credibility of traditional institutions in Offa.

3. Grassroots Governance: The Kwara State government must ensure that local governments operate independently at the grassroots level, bringing government closer to the people. Genuine political will is required to allow local governments to meet the needs of their communities effectively. Local elections should be reinstated to allow residents to choose their representatives, replacing the current system where caretaker administrations are appointed by the state government.

4. Proper Funding and Accountability: The traditional institutions' 5% allocation from the local government budget should be properly disbursed in good faith, recognizing their crucial role in livelihood and community security. Likewise, the state government must ensure that local government funds reach the grassroots level to support development projects. Political actors who misappropriate funds or violate the rights of the people should be held accountable.

5. Preserving Cultural Integrity: Traditional leaders should safeguard their prestige and cultural legacy by avoiding political corruption. They must continue to serve in a fatherly capacity, ensuring that their influence contributes positively to community development rather than being diminished by economic or political misconduct.

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