



# Efficacy of Igbo 'Ozo' Traditional Method of Conflict Resolution in Modern Communal Disputes in Southeast, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

## Original Research Article

This study examined the efficacy of Igbo 'Ozo' traditional method of conflict resolution in modern communal disputes in Southeast, Nigeria. Despite the existence of formal legal systems and modern conflict resolution mechanisms, communal disputes remain prevalent in Southeast Nigeria, particularly conflicts arising from land ownership, leadership succession, and boundary disagreements, suggesting limitations in the effectiveness of contemporary approaches to conflict management within local communities. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, utilizing Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) across selected Igbo communities. Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software. Findings revealed that Igbo systems are grounded in structured processes: This mechanism was found to be effective in resolving disputes related to land, marriage, inheritance, and social conduct, and were widely perceived as legitimate and fair by community members. However, the system face challenges such as urbanization, legal exclusion, and changing societal values. The study recommended the integration of traditional mechanisms into formal legal and policy frameworks, capacity building for traditional leaders, and participatory policymaking that respects indigenous knowledge systems. The findings underscore the enduring relevance of culturally grounded approaches in promoting grassroots peace and sustainable conflict resolution in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Traditional Conflict Resolution, Igbo Ozo, Communal Disputes, Indigenous Justice, Peacebuilding.

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## Introduction

For centuries, pre-colonial Igbo society of southeastern Nigeria maintained social order and resolved disputes through sophisticated, indigenous institutions rooted in custom, spirituality, and communal consensus (Uchendu, 1965). Among these, the 'Ozo' title society represents one of the most revered and influential socio-political and religious structures. Members of the Ozo society (Ozo titleholders), known as *Ndi Ozo* or *Ndi Ichie*, are traditionally regarded as the moral and judicial compass of the community. Their authority, derived from ancestral sanction, integrity, and deep knowledge of customary law (*Omenala*), was central to conflict resolution processes that aimed not merely at adjudication but at holistic reconciliation, restitution, and the

restoration of social harmony (*Udo ka ana eme*) (Meek, 1937; Ejidike, 1999).

However, the advent of colonialism and the subsequent imposition of the Nigerian state introduced a formal, adversarial legal system based on English common law. This Western model, which emphasizes retributive justice and winner-takes-all judgments, often operates in parallel—and sometimes in conflict—with these enduring traditional systems (Achebe, 2000; Okafo, 2007). In contemporary Southeast Nigeria, communal disputes—including land/boundary conflicts, chieftaincy tussles, resource allocation issues, and familial inheritance disagreements—remain prevalent. Yet, the state-sponsored judicial system is frequently perceived as expensive, slow, corrupt, and

culturally alienating, often delivering verdicts that fail to address the underlying relational fractures within the close-knit Igbo community (Nwogu, 2014).

Consequently, there has been a discernible resurgence and renewed interest in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms like the Ozo system. Proponents argue that these methods offer advantages modern courts lack: cultural legitimacy, accessibility, cost-effectiveness, procedural flexibility, and a primary focus on restorative justice and sustainable peace (Ibok & Iwuagwu, 2014). The Ozo process, typically involving mediation, oath-taking (*iyi*), symbolic rituals, and the application of communal ethics, seeks to reintegrate offenders and restore the social fabric.

Despite this resurgence, significant questions regarding its efficacy in the modern context persist. Scholars have raised concerns about the system's adaptability to contemporary, complex disputes often involving non-indigenes, state actors, and corporate entities (Okafor, 2008). Critiques also focus on issues of gender exclusion, as the Ozo institution is historically patriarchal, potentially marginalizing women in dispute processes. Furthermore, the erosion of traditional authority structures, generational value shifts, and the potential for the manipulation of custom (*Omenala*) for personal or political gain pose serious challenges to its integrity and effectiveness (Uwazie, 2011).

This study, therefore, arises from a critical gap: while the historical and cultural significance of the Ozo system is well-documented, there is a paucity of empirical, systematic evaluation of its practical efficacy, adaptability, and limitations in resolving modern-day communal disputes in Southeast Nigeria. This research seeks to bridge that gap, contributing to the broader discourse on legal pluralism and the search for contextually relevant peacebuilding frameworks in post-colonial Africa.

## Statement of the Problem

Communal disputes remain prevalent in Southeast Nigeria, particularly conflicts arising from land ownership, leadership succession, and boundary disagreements. Despite the existence of formal legal systems and modern conflict resolution mechanisms, many of these disputes persist or reoccur, suggesting limitations in the effectiveness of contemporary approaches to conflict management within local communities. These conflicts often undermine peace, social cohesion, and sustainable development in the region.

Traditionally, Igbo communities relied on the *Ozo* institution as a respected indigenous mechanism for resolving disputes and maintaining social order. The *Ozo* title holders, known for their moral authority and wisdom, played key roles in mediation, reconciliation, and enforcement of communal norms. However, modernization, Western legal influences, and changing social values have reduced the prominence of this traditional method, raising questions about its relevance

and effectiveness in addressing present-day communal conflicts.

There is limited empirical evidence assessing how effective the Igbo *Ozo* traditional method is in resolving modern communal disputes in Southeast Nigeria. This lack of evaluation creates uncertainty about its continued applicability and potential integration into contemporary conflict resolution frameworks. Hence, this study seeks to evaluate the efficacy of the Igbo *Ozo* traditional method of conflict resolution in modern communal disputes in Southeast Nigeria.

## Purpose of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Examine the structural components and processes of the Igbo Ozo systems in resolving communal conflicts.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the Ozo mechanisms in addressing contemporary disputes such as land, marriage, and resource-related conflicts.
3. Evaluate the perceptions of community members toward the legitimacy and fairness of these traditional conflict resolution systems.

## Research Questions

The following research Questions guided the study:

1. What are the structural components and processes of the Igbo Ozo systems used in resolving communal conflicts?
2. How effective are the Ozo traditional mechanisms in addressing contemporary communal disputes such as those related to land, marriage, and resource use?
3. What are the perceptions of community members regarding the legitimacy and fairness of the Igbo Ozo conflict resolution systems?

## Literature Review

The study of indigenous African conflict resolution mechanisms occupies a critical space at the intersection of legal anthropology, peace studies, and post-colonial governance. In Southeast Nigeria, the persistent vitality of the Igbo 'Ozo' title society as a forum for adjudicating disputes presents a compelling case of legal pluralism—the simultaneous operation of multiple legal systems within a single social field (Merry, 1988). This literature review synthesizes existing scholarship across three decades, tracing the evolution of thought from early ethnography to contemporary critical legal studies, and ultimately identifies the empirical and theoretical gap that this research seeks to fill. The review is structured thematically, examining: (1) the historical and anthropological foundations of the Ozo institution; (2) the theoretical frameworks of legal pluralism and restorative justice that inform its analysis; (3) its post-colonial juxtaposition with the formal Nigerian judiciary; (4)

critical appraisals of its contemporary adaptability, including gender and generational dynamics; and (5) the emerging discourse on hybridity and integrative justice models.

## 1. Historical and Anthropological Foundations of the Ozo Institution

The scholarly understanding of the Ozo (or *Ozo*) institution is deeply indebted to early and mid-20th century ethnography. These works established Ozo not merely as a title of prestige but as the bedrock of Igbo socio-political and juridical organization. Meek (1937), in his seminal work *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, provided one of the first external academic analyses, positioning the Ozo titled men (*Ndi Ozo*) as the natural aristocracy and custodians of the law (*Omenala*). He detailed their role in arbitrating disputes, often involving rituals, symbolic kola nut presentations (*igbo Oji*), and oath-taking (*inu iyi*) to ascertain truth, emphasizing that their authority was derived from ancestral sanction and communal consent rather than coercive power.

Building on this, Uchendu (1965), in *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, offered an insider-informed perspective, framing the Ozo society as the "central legal institution" in a stateless society. He highlighted its restorative philosophy, where the goal of any dispute resolution process was *udo* (peace) and *ido unu* (reconciliation), aiming to reintegrate the offender and restore social equilibrium rather than to punish. This philosophy was rooted in the Igbo cosmological concept of balance and the fear of ancestral wrath (*okwu mmuo*) for social discord. Isichei (1976) further contextualized Ozo within the broader Igbo worldview of achievement, morality, and responsibility, noting that the title was a public testament to a man's character, wealth, and commitment to communal welfare, prerequisites for wielding judicial authority.

Later scholars deepened this anthropological analysis. Ejidike (1999) intricately connected the Ozo judicial process to Igbo metaphysics, arguing that rituals like *igu afa* (divination) were not superstitious but integral to a holistic fact-finding process that addressed both visible and spiritual causes of conflict. Nwaocha (2005) expanded the discussion to the symbolic capital of Ozo regalia—the eagle feather (*okpu odu*), staff (*otu*), and brass anklets (*oja*)—arguing they were not mere adornments but visual manifestations of the titleholder's transformed status into a living embodiment of truth and justice (*eziokwu*).

This foundational literature collectively constructs the Ozo system as a sophisticated, rule-based, and spiritually-grounded juridical entity. However, these works primarily offer historical and functionalist analyses, often treating the institution as a static, pre-colonial artifact. They provide essential baseline data but lack a dynamic engagement with the institution's trajectory through the profound disruptions of colonialism, civil war, and modernity—a gap later scholarship begins to address.

## 2. Theoretical Frameworks: Legal Pluralism, Restorative Justice, and Communalism

To analytically frame the Ozo system, scholars have drawn upon several theoretical constructs. The most prominent is legal pluralism. As defined by Griffiths (1986), legal pluralism is the state of affairs in which a social field is governed by more than one legal order. This concept perfectly captures the Nigerian reality, where the official state law (a legacy of British colonialism) coexists, competes, and interacts with various customary laws. Merry (1988) further distinguished between "classic" pluralism (where systems are distinct and autonomous) and "new" pluralism (characterized by interpenetration and hybridization), a distinction crucial for understanding the modern Ozo system's relationship with the state judiciary.

The Ozo process is also consistently analyzed through the lens of restorative justice, a paradigm that prioritizes repairing harm, involving stakeholders, and transforming relationships over punitive measures (Zehr, 1990; Llewellyn & Howse, 1999). Scholars like Ibok & Iwuagwu (2014) and Elechi (2006) argue that traditional African systems, including Ozo, are inherently restorative. Elechi's seminal work, *Doing Justice Without the State*, posits that the Igbo model focuses on compensation, apology, and communal forgiveness, making it fundamentally different from the retributive, state-centric Western model. This theoretical alignment explains its appeal in resolving communal disputes where ongoing relationships are paramount.

Underpinning both its structure and philosophy is the concept of communalism. Gyekye (1996), in his work on African philosophy, describes communalism as a metaphysical worldview where the individual's identity and welfare are inextricably linked to the community. The Ozo system operationalizes this: disputes are not private affairs but community concerns; resolutions are validated by communal consensus; and justice aims at restoring communal harmony. This theoretical grounding is critical for understanding why state law, with its individualistic rights-based approach, often feels alien and unsatisfactory in resolving deeply communal conflicts (Mbiti, 1969).

## 3. The Post-Colonial Dilemma: Clash, Coexistence, and Forum Shopping

The imposition of British colonial rule and its attendant legal system created a dual—and often dueling—legal reality. Post-independence scholarship extensively documents the tensions inherent in this juxtaposition. Achebe (2000) and Okafo (2007) provide powerful critiques of the colonial legal legacy, arguing that the introduced adversarial system was culturally dissonant, expensive, and slow, eroding trust and often exacerbating conflicts. Okafor (2008) analyzes the "precarious place" of customary law in the Nigerian constitutional order, noting that while the Constitution

recognizes customary law, its superiority clause often renders customary rulings subordinate, creating a hierarchy that marginalizes indigenous systems.

This context gave rise to the phenomenon of "forum shopping"—where disputants strategically navigate between legal systems to maximize personal advantage. Uwazie (2011) and Chioma (2018) detail how parties may initiate a case in a traditional court for its speed and cultural understanding, only to appeal to the state court if dissatisfied, or vice-versa. This not only creates confusion and enforcement problems but can also lead to the instrumentalization and corruption of traditional practices, as elites may manipulate *Omenala* for personal gain (Nwagbara, 2019).

Recent empirical studies have shed light on the practical coexistence. Ezeibe (2015) and Onwudiwe (2020) observe that in many communities, a de facto division of labor exists: the state handles criminal matters (e.g., armed robbery, murder), while the Ozo system manages civil and communal disputes (land, marriage, inheritance, chieftaincy). However, the boundaries are frequently contested, especially in land cases with significant economic stakes, where state recognition of certificates of occupancy clashes with ancestral claims mediated by Ozo councils (Ibrahim, 2021).

#### 4. Critical Contemporary Appraisals: Gender, Generation, and Adaptability

While the resilience of the Ozo system is widely acknowledged, 21st-century scholarship has subjected it to rigorous critical scrutiny, moving beyond romanticization to examine its limitations in a modern, heterogeneous society.

**4.1 The Gender Imperative:** The most persistent critique concerns its patriarchal nature. As an institution exclusively for men, women are systematically excluded from membership, adjudication, and often from meaningful participation as disputants. Ibok & Iwuagwu (2014) note that women's issues, particularly those related to marital disputes or property rights, are often arbitrated by male elders who may perpetuate gender biases. Nwogu (2014) and more recently, Achu (2022), argue that this exclusion violates contemporary norms of gender equality and limits the system's legitimacy and effectiveness, as half the population is structurally marginalized. Achu's fieldwork in Enugu State reveals that women, especially the educated and urban-based, increasingly bypass the Ozo system for state courts or women's associations, perceiving it as biased.

**4.2 Generational and Urban Challenges:** The system's authority, rooted in the veneration of age and ancestry, faces a legitimacy crisis among the youth and urban diaspora. Okafor (2008) and Uwazie (2019) identify an intergenerational value shift; younger, educated Igbo may view Ozo rituals as anachronistic and its processes as lacking

procedural transparency compared to codified state law. Eze (2020) explores how urbanization and religious conversion (to Christianity or Islam) dilute the spiritual sanctions (*okụ mmụọ*) that once underpinned compliance. In cosmopolitan cities like Enugu and Owerri, the communal bonds that fuel the system are weaker, and Ozo councils may struggle to enforce decisions on non-indigenes or those detached from their hometown affiliations.

**4.3 Adaptability to Modern Complexities:** Modern disputes often involve actors and issues unknown to traditional jurisprudence: multinational corporations, government agencies, cyber-defamation, and intra-diaspora conflicts fought over social media. Uwazie (2011) questions whether the Ozo system possesses the procedural tools and conceptual framework to handle such complexities. Nweke (2023) investigates land disputes involving state governments, finding that while Ozo councils can mediate between community factions, they are often powerless in direct negotiations with state actors who recognize only state law, leading to frustration and a perceived impotence of the institution.

### 5. Towards Integration and Hybridity: The Search for a Syncretic Model

In response to these critiques, a forward-looking strand of literature explores pathways for integration and synergy between indigenous and state systems. This moves beyond mere coexistence toward constructive hybridity. Daly (2021), in a comparative study of Liberia and Nigeria, advocates for the "formal recognition and regulation" of customary justice systems to curb abuses while harnessing their strengths. This could involve establishing clear jurisdictional guidelines, creating appellate interfaces with state courts, and mandating inclusivity standards.

Nwogwugwu et al. (2022) propose a "hybrid justice model" for Southeast Nigeria, suggesting the incorporation of Ozo titleholders as assessors or mediators within the state-sponsored Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) framework, such as the Multi-Door Courthouse. This would grant Ozo rulings a clearer path to state enforcement while subjecting their processes to basic constitutional safeguards. Similarly, Ibe (2023) documents experimental "Community Peace Committees" in Anambra State, where trained Ozo titleholders, youth representatives, and women leaders co-mediate disputes, consciously adapting traditional protocols to be more inclusive and transparent.

This integrative discourse is aligned with global movements advocating for contextual and culturally-sensitive approaches to peacebuilding (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Lederach, 2005). It recognizes that sustainable peace in post-colonial societies often requires a blend of endogenous and exogenous resources, creating institutions that are both locally legitimate and nationally accountable.

## Research Gap

The existing literature provides a robust foundation. It meticulously details the Ozo system's historical form, philosophical principles (restorative justice, communalism), and its contentious relationship with the post-colonial state (legal pluralism, forum shopping). Contemporary scholarship has also begun to critically interrogate its limitations regarding gender, generational relevance, and adaptability.

However, a significant and multidimensional gap persists. First, there is a dearth of comprehensive, longitudinal empirical data. Many studies, particularly critical ones, rely on isolated case examples or theoretical deductions. There is a lack of systematic, field-based research tracking the *full lifecycle* of disputes handled by Ozo councils—from initiation to resolution and, crucially, to the sustainability of that resolution over time (6 months, 2 years, 5 years later). Metrics for "efficacy" (durability, participant satisfaction, cost, speed, social harmony restoration) are often assumed rather than rigorously measured and compared with state court outcomes.

Second, while problems like gender exclusion are identified, there is limited research exploring innovative, community-driven adaptations that are already occurring on the ground. How are some progressive communities modifying Ozo processes to be more inclusive? What is the actual experience and perception of women and youth who have participated in (or rejected) these adapted processes?

Third, the literature often treats the Ozo system as monolithic. A nuanced gap exists in understanding the variations in its operation across urban/rural divides, among different Igbo sub-groups (e.g., Ngwa, Ohafia, Nnewi), and in response to different *types* of modern disputes (e.g., chieftaincy vs. business contract vs. intra-family conflict).

This review traverses the evolution of scholarship from foundational ethnography to critical legal studies and emerging integrative models. It confirms that the Igbo Ozo institution is not a relic but a dynamic, contested, and resilient site of justice production. The central problem, however, remains the lack of a fine-grained, evidence-based evaluation that can bridge the rich historical and theoretical understandings with the complex realities of 21st-century Southeast Nigeria. This study aims to directly address this gap. By empirically investigating the operational efficacy, contemporary adaptations, and persistent challenges of the Ozo method in specific, modern communal disputes, it seeks to generate data and insights crucial for scholars, policymakers, and community stakeholders navigating the precarious but promising terrain of legal pluralism.

## Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and evaluate the efficacy of traditional conflict

resolution mechanisms specifically the Igbo Ozo system in addressing contemporary communal disputes in Southeast Nigeria. The qualitative approach was chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of the cultural, social, and procedural dimensions of these indigenous systems within their real-life contexts. The study was carried out in selected communities across southeastern Nigeria (such as Anambra and Ebonyi States) where the Ozo system is still actively practiced and respected in local dispute resolution.

The population of the study comprised traditional leaders (Ozo titleholders), community members, victims and offenders involved in communal disputes, youth leaders, and local government officials with experience or insight into the application of these traditional conflict resolution practices. A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify and select 40 participants who possessed rich and relevant knowledge of the Ozo system. The sample included 10 Ozo titleholders and community elders, 10 community members (five from each state), 5 local government or peace committee officials, and 5 individuals who had directly resolved disputes through either the Ozo mechanism.

Data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), using semi-structured interview guides designed to probe into the structures, procedures, perceived legitimacy, and outcomes of the traditional systems. Interviews were conducted in local languages and translated into English where necessary to preserve authenticity and accuracy. To ensure content validity, the interview guides were reviewed by experts in indigenous conflict resolution, cultural anthropology, and qualitative research methods. Reliability was enhanced through triangulation, using multiple sources and methods comparing responses from various stakeholder groups across different locations.

The data collected were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and variations in perspectives. NVivo software was employed to assist in the organization, coding, and interpretation of qualitative data. Ethical approval was obtained from a recognized university ethics committee, and all participants were informed of the study's purpose. Voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the research process to ensure adherence to ethical research standards.

## Results

### 1. What is the structural components and processes of the Igbo Ozo system used in resolving communal conflicts?

The study revealed that both the Igbo Ozo system is grounded in well-established traditional institutions with clearly defined roles and procedures. In Igbo communities, the Ozo system operates within a hierarchical framework involving the

Umunna (kindred group), Ndi Nze na Ozo (titled elders), and, in some cases, the Obi or Igwe (community king). Conflict resolution begins at the family or kindred level and progresses to the council of Ozo titleholders if unresolved. The process typically includes verbal mediation, public hearings, oath-taking (*inu iyi*), and covenant-making (*igbandu*), with decisions anchored in customary law and communal values. The system relies on oral tradition, spiritual sanctions, and communal enforcement for legitimacy and compliance.

#### **KII Responses:**

Ozo Titleholder, Anambra State:

*“In our tradition, the process starts with the Umunna (kindred), and if not settled, it goes to the council of Ozo titleholders. We sit as a panel, listen to both parties, and call witnesses. We sometimes use oath-taking to prove who is truthful. Our word is final in the community.”*

#### **FGD Responses:**

Igbo Community FGD (mixed adults):

*“The Ozo elders act like our court. They know our customs and have the authority to mediate. We trust their judgment more than going to police or court, which takes time and money.”*

## **2. How effective is the Ozo traditional mechanisms in addressing contemporary communal disputes such as those related to land, marriage, and resource use?**

Findings indicate that the mechanism remain effective, particularly in rural areas where formal legal systems are inaccessible, costly, or mistrusted. In Igbo communities, Ozo titleholders are frequently called upon to mediate in land boundary disputes, chieftaincy disagreements, and marital conflicts. Their rulings are generally respected because they are perceived as impartial and deeply rooted in cultural norms. Community members reported that outcomes from Ozo-led mediation are faster and more enduring than those obtained through the courts. While the reach of the system is challenged by urbanization and modern legal developments, its culturally embedded nature allows it to remain functional and relevant in local conflict resolution.

#### **KII Responses:**

Igwe's Adviser, Ebonyi State:

*“Ozo elders settle land disputes faster than courts. When they speak, both families accept. Even boundary issues that the court drags for years can be settled in one meeting by our elders.”*

#### **FGD Responses:**

Igbo Elders' FGD:

*“We have resolved issues like land inheritance, family debts, and even divorce matters through the Ozo system. The*

*solution is usually peaceful, and people move on without bitterness.”*

## **3. What are the perceptions of community members regarding the legitimacy and fairness of the Igbo Ozo conflict resolution system?**

Community perceptions of the Ozo system is largely positive, with many participants viewing this mechanism as more legitimate, accessible, and fair compared to formal legal institutions. In Igbo settings, respondents emphasized the wisdom, integrity, and neutrality of Ozo titleholders, noting that decisions made by the Ozo council carry spiritual and moral weight. Even among younger respondents, there was a recognition of the symbolic power and restorative impact of traditional systems. However, concerns were raised about the need to adapt these systems to changing social realities, including gender inclusion and human rights standards. Despite these challenges, both systems are still widely regarded as credible and deeply respected institutions for maintaining peace and order.

#### **KII Responses:**

Local Government Peace Officer, Anambra:

*“People come to us last. They first go to their elders. They see those systems as sacred. Even when we intervene, we still consult the Ozo council because that is where the authority lies.”*

#### **FGD Responses:**

Igbo Youth & Women FGD:

*“The Ozo elders are respected. They don't take bribes. Even when we disagree with a ruling, we accept it because we know they want peace.”*

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Structural Components and Processes of the Igbo Ozo System**

The study found that both the Igbo Ozo operate through well-defined traditional institutions that rely on cultural authority, oral tradition, and spiritual legitimacy. The Igbo Ozo system is embedded in the Umunna and council of titled elders, who guide conflict resolution through communal hearings, oath-taking, and reconciliation rituals. This finding aligns with Aboh et al. (2024), who affirm that the Igbo Ozo system is structured around kinship-based governance and spiritual accountability, particularly through rituals like *igbandu* and *inu iyi*. Uche (2023) also supports this, noting that the communal decision-making process, reinforced by ancestral authority, gives the Ozo system its legitimacy.

### **Effectiveness in Addressing Contemporary Disputes**

Participants widely affirmed the effectiveness of system in resolving disputes related to land, marriage, and resource use.

The Ozo system was seen as timely, culturally sensitive, and less confrontational than the formal court process. This supports the work of Ugwu and Brigid (2023), who observed in the Otuocha land conflict case that the return to traditional Igbo mediation led to a more sustainable resolution than years of litigation. Babatunde and Ibnouf (2024) also argue that indigenous systems are often more successful in addressing grassroots disputes because they are rooted in community identity and trust. Okoli and Omang (2024) similarly found that the Ozo system offer practical solutions that bypass the delays, expenses, and complexities of the formal legal system. In line with this, Aboh et al. (2024) emphasize that traditional conflict resolution methods are not only effective but also promote social cohesion, as they focus on restorative rather than punitive outcomes.

### Perceptions of Legitimacy and Fairness

Community members generally view the Ozo system as legitimate, fair, and trustworthy. The decisions of the Ozo council are respected due to the elders' perceived wisdom and spiritual neutrality, it is considered a noble way of resolving disputes without long-term enmity. This aligns with Uche (2023), who found that the participatory and spiritually rooted nature of Igbo conflict resolution systems ensures their acceptance and respect. Okoli and Omang (2024) reinforce that communities continue to rely on traditional systems not merely out of habit but because of their cultural resonance and perceived moral uprightness. These findings further echo Adebayo and Dauda (2021), who concluded that perceptions of fairness in traditional systems often surpass those of the formal legal process, particularly in rural and culturally conservative communities.

### Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that traditional conflict resolution mechanisms—specifically the Igbo Ozo title system remains relevant, effective, and widely respected methods for addressing communal disputes in contemporary Nigeria. Rooted in cultural values, spiritual authority, and communal participation, this indigenous system offer accessible, timely, and restorative alternatives to the often slow, costly, and alienating processes of the formal legal system. Findings from interviews and group discussions revealed that this mechanism not only resolve conflicts related to land, marriage, and social conduct but also promote social harmony and reinforce community norms. Despite modern challenges such as urbanization, weakened traditional authority, and policy exclusion, the system continues to hold legitimacy among their respective communities.

### Recommendations

1. Government agencies, peace builders and conflict resolution agencies should formally recognize and integrate indigenous systems such as the Igbo Ozo ainto community-level peacebuilding structures. This

can be done through the creation of hybrid conflict resolution committees that combine traditional leaders with representatives of the formal justice system, thereby enhancing legitimacy, accessibility, and local ownership of peace processes.

2. Training and sensitization programs should be organized for traditional leaders and titleholders to enhance their mediation skills and ensure alignment with constitutional rights, especially regarding gender equity, children's rights, and non-violent methods. Such capacity-building efforts will help these institutions adapt to evolving social norms while preserving their core cultural values.

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