

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP CRISES AND SECURITY IN ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Community leadership crises have become a recurrent phenomenon in Anambra State, Nigeria, reflecting deep-rooted political, economic, and socio-cultural tensions within local governance structures. The complex interplay between traditional institutions and modern state authority has generated multiple claims to legitimacy, producing leadership vacuums, protracted litigations, and violent confrontations in communities such as Ihite, Nawfia, Abba, and Alor. This study examines the underlying drivers of leadership crises, including political interference, economic competition over communal resources, and the erosion of traditional rotation and dispute-resolution mechanisms. It further analyzes how these crises contribute to insecurity, social division, and the disruption of community-driven development initiatives. The Marxist theoretical framework underpins the analysis, emphasizing how class interests and struggles over access to power and material resources fuel persistent leadership contests. Findings reveal that leadership crises polarize communities, weaken trust, undermine traditional authority, and discourage state and private sector investment. The study recommends strict enforcement of community constitutions, strengthening of indigenous mediation mechanisms, proactive security interventions, and grassroots peacebuilding programs. These measures are necessary to restore community cohesion, depoliticize leadership selection processes, and enhance security and development across Anambra communities. The research contributes to policy debates on local governance reforms, conflict prevention, and sustainable peacebuilding in southeastern Nigeria.

Keywords: *Community Leadership Crises, Chieftaincy Disputes, Insecurity, Political Interference, Traditional Institutions, Governance, Development.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Anambra State occupies a strategic place in southeastern Nigeria, hosting dense commercial centres such as Onitsha and Awka, a high rural–urban population ratio, and complex local governance arrangements rooted in customary institutions and modern state structures. Traditional rulers, town unions, and development associations remain central to community

decision-making and dispute resolution even as formal state actors assume greater roles. This layered leadership architecture produces both resilience and friction when competing claims to authority emerge.

Recent years show a rising frequency of community leadership crises across Anambra's localities. Disputes over coronations, town-union control, land sales, and alleged abuses of office have generated protests, court actions, and occasional violent confrontations in communities such as Ihite, Nawfia, Abba, and Alor. Media coverage documents clashes averted at the last minute, calls on the state governor to intervene, and long-running court lists tied to chieftaincy claims. These episodes reveal how leadership struggles now provoke deep social divisions rather than remaining limited to ceremonial disagreement. Drivers of these crises include politicisation of traditional offices, proliferation of multiple institutions claiming legitimacy, and contestation over land and resources that produce economic incentives for rivalry. Political actors deploy endorsements and legal maneuvers to influence outcomes, while competing families and interest groups exploit ambiguous customary rules. Court overrulings that depose sitting monarchs or leaders often provoke backlash, leaving communities in prolonged leadership vacuums and legal limbo. Research on communal conflicts in Nigeria identifies land, chieftaincy rivalry, and elite manipulation as recurring causes of local instability.

Security outcomes from leadership crises are serious. Fragmented local authority weakens traditional mechanisms for conflict containment, reduces cooperation with security agencies, and creates fertile ground for criminality, intimidation, and economic disruption. Markets, farms, and local services suffer when town unions split or when rival factions deploy hired thugs to assert claims. In some instances, unresolved leadership conflicts discourage development actors and investors, worsening poverty and grievance that fuel further instability. Academic studies link chieftaincy disputes to reduced community cohesion and heightened insecurity across Nigerian states.

State responses have included judicial litigation, executive interventions, and ad hoc mediation. Yet reliance on courts produces delays and renewed contestation when rulings meet local resistance. Executive fiat risks politicising outcomes; community-based mediation sometimes succeeds but lacks institutional support and impartiality. Persistent gaps in clear legal frameworks for recognition, installation, and removal of community leaders maintain a permissive environment for disputes to escalate. Given the prevalence of leadership crises in

Anambra and their observable links to insecurity, livelihood loss, and governance breakdown, systematic research is essential. This study will map the causes, actors, and consequences of community leadership crises, assess the effectiveness of existing dispute-resolution mechanisms, and propose reforms targeted at the State Government, Traditional Rulers' Councils, and local institutions. The findings will supply evidence necessary for policy reforms that restore authority, strengthen community cohesion, and reduce security risks across Anambra communities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the underlying political, economic, and socio-cultural factors driving community leadership crises in Anambra State.
2. To analyze the extent to which community leadership crises contribute to insecurity, social division, and disruption of development in Anambra State.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership

Leadership entails the exertion of power or influence within social collectives, including groups, organizations, communities, or nations. Iszatt-White and Saunders (2017) regard leadership as both a field of study and a practical competency, involving the capacity of an individual or organization to direct or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations. Leadership may be perceived as either a behavioral pattern or an intrinsic attribute. Leadership is the influence exercised by an individual or group to organize or direct a large body towards the attainment of specific objectives. Leadership, as a human disposition, pertains to the character attributes that empower an individual to influence others. Leadership is therefore synonymous with charisma, defined as the personal allure or authority to guide. Democratic political leaders must be cognizant of the repercussions of their leadership style on the populace, lest the adverse impacts undermine the democratic process. Inadequate leadership results in unfavorable outcomes, such as the concentration of power, which can foster corruption and tyranny. This underscores the democratic imperative for accountability in leadership. Such dynamics create an environment of subservience and disparity, potentially dissuading individuals from engaging in matters that affect them, ultimately leading to a failure to assume responsibility for their own futures.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt (2017) assert that leadership is established only when a group willingly follows an individual, rather than by command or coercion, and not in reaction to instinctual impulses but based on affirmative and relatively rational considerations. The notion of leadership should be comprehended as spanning a broad spectrum of actions. It pertains to the administration of social organizations and the governance of nations. It may pertain to the rather nebulous process of influence in the establishment of stylistic or opinion norms, or it may involve explicit directives within a hierarchical structure. It encompasses oversight and leadership, regular administration, and organizational development.

Community Leadership

Leadership within the Community A community lacking effective leadership may be ill-equipped to organize resources or impact community development initiatives. According to Kotter (2014), a community cannot thrive without dynamic leaders who are willing and capable of initiating action. The absence of competent community leaders frequently impedes community development (Wahid, Ahmad, Talib, Shah, Tahir, Jan, & Saleem, 2017). Community development is viewed as an ongoing activity focused on enhancing the quality of life within the community. The focus is on ongoing enhancement by community people to effectuate change in their lives, typically influenced by the prevailing power system (Phinos, & Adegbite, 2025). The primary objective of community education is to enhance members' talents and potential to improve their well-being and quality of life by optimizing resource usage for social and economic benefit. This can only be accomplished through community education initiatives and the presence of dedicated and passionate leadership. Community leadership is fundamental to the success of community development efforts. A community leader must possess the ability to persuade and guide individuals to attain collective objectives. His leadership style should bestow upon him the authority and power to identify the members' perceived requirements and the means to fulfill those wants, so enhancing their living standards and fostering unity among them. Community leaders must receive training in leadership styles within a community education framework to foster a proper understanding between the populace and their leaders. This leadership method acknowledges the relationship between the group and the leader (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). It endorses the leadership hypothesis that individuals are inclined to follow those whom they believe can facilitate the achievement of their objectives. Community education instructs leaders to exemplify effective leadership. Educating community leaders within a community education framework will enable

communities to recognize their needs and propose solutions accordingly. Community leaders ought to receive training in community development (Wahid, Ahmad, Talib, Shah, Tahir, Jan, & Saleem, 2017). Community development is perceived as an ongoing activity focused on enhancing the quality of life within the community. The focus is on ongoing enhancement by community people to effectuate change in their lives, typically influenced by the prevailing power system.

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Community Leadership Crises

Community leadership crises manifesting as chieftaincy tussles, town-union breakups, and contested local elections are widely documented across southeastern Nigeria and have intensified in Anambra State. Traditional institutions and town unions remain central to local governance, but their roles are now contested by party politicians, legal interventions, and competing elites, producing frequent leadership vacuums and community division. Ekebuike, Ono, & Anyadiegwu, (2023) highlighted how overlapping customary rules and modern state

procedures create ambiguity over recognition, installation, and removal of leaders, a condition that breeds repeated disputes and litigation.

According to Amali, & Biereenu-Nnabugwu, (2023), recurring crises in communities such as Ihite, Abba, Nawfia and others, where coronation contests or town-union rivalries have escalated from protests to near-violent confrontations, prompting gubernatorial appeals and court action. These episodes signal that leadership contests are no longer symbolic but have concrete political and economic stakes. News coverage underscores the immediacy and frequency of these conflicts in 2024–2025, revealing patterns of elite backing, contested endorsements, and resort to force or litigation when mediation fails (Chukwuemeka, & Ernest, 2025).

The drivers of such crises in politicisation, elite manipulation, and competition over land and resources. Elite theory and studies of communal conflict in the Southeast show how local elites instrumentalise chieftaincy and town-union offices to access patronage, control land transactions, and influence local revenue flows, thereby intensifying rivalry among kinship groups and interest blocs. Where state institutions are weak or biased, litigated outcomes often prolong uncertainty and deepen grievances (Titus, 2023).

The security implications are significant. Fragmented local authority undermines customary mechanisms for dispute resolution and cooperation with security agencies, creating opportunities for criminality, intimidation, and economic disruption. Zubair, (2021) contended that communal conflicts and leadership struggles (including comparative work in other Nigerian regions) finds that unresolved leadership disputes degrade social cohesion, reduce investor confidence, and can precipitate cycles of retaliation and vigilantism when authorities lack legitimacy. In resource-rich or commercially strategic towns, these dynamics may have outsized economic impacts.

Theoretical accounts emphasise norm collisions between customary and statutory rules: when state law, court rulings, and executive edicts conflict with entrenched local norms, sanctions and legitimacy weaken, producing contested authority that fuels crises. Luthans, & Stajkovic, (2012) suggest that strengthening formal recognition procedures and supporting impartial, locally rooted mediation can reduce escalation, but only if reforms address underlying incentives for elite capture.

Interventions documented in the studies and press include court adjudication, executive appointments or caretaker committees, and ad hoc mediation by traditional councils. However, court reliance produces delays and may not secure compliance; executive fiat risks politicisation. Comparative research and case studies indicate that durable solutions combine clear legal frameworks, inclusive selection processes, and empowered, impartial local dispute-resolution mechanisms that restore legitimacy and reduce the appeal of extra-legal responses (Oyeyipo, Oyekola, Salako, & Babatunde, 2024).

Types of Community Leadership Crises in Anambra State

Chieftaincy / Kingship Tussles

These pertain to conflicts around the designation of the traditional ruler (Igwe/king) among communities. The throne of the Alor community alternates between the Ezi and Ifite factions according to a constitution; nevertheless, recent breaches of this constitution have resulted in significant confrontations. In the Azia community (Ihiala LGA), two rival candidates are contesting the legitimacy of the monarchy, including disagreements on state recognition.

Town Union / President-General Election Disputes

These crises arise regarding the rightful holder of the post of town union President General, frequently associated with electoral irregularities or factional disputes. For example, Abba Town Union (Njikoka LGA) has faced allegations that the village of Amabor has been deprived of its opportunity to appoint the PG since 2020. In Nawfia, there existed concurrent executives of the municipal union and competing claims bolstered by judicial actions.

Parallel or Factional Leadership

Occasionally, many factions assert legitimacy concurrently, leading to "parallel leaderships" inside a singular community. Nawfia had several contenders for the Igweship and town union leadership. Ekwulobia, where two factions, EDU and EPA, have coexisted and contested leadership executive authority.

Constitutional or Procedural Breaches (Turn Taking, Zoning, Recognition Violations)

Crises often stem from ignoring community constitutions, customary rotation of stool (rotational kingship), or state-law requirements. Example: Alor's case where constitutional

rotation between Ezi and Ifite sections hasn't been respected. Also, objections in Oba community about elections being held while court cases pending, or elections not following zoning rules.

Conflict between Monarchs / Traditional Rulers and Town/Union Bodies

Disagreements sometimes involve the monarch (Igwe) and town unions or president generals over roles, festivals, ceremonies, or recognition. Example: In Enugwu-Agidi, the town union ordered the monarch to halt his Ofala festival because there were tensions with the union's leadership.

Also, disputes where the union challenges monarch's actions or the monarch is accused of overstepping duties.

Legal & Judicial Disputes / Court Cases over Leadership

Many of these crises escalate into court battles, often taking long time, creating leadership vacuums until resolved. For instance, Alor had many court cases relating to chieftaincy stool disputes. Also, when executive bodies are sacked by courts, or when elections are nullified pending legal decisions (Phinos, & Adegbite, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

Marxist theory, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century, provides a framework for understanding social conflicts as products of class struggles rooted in material interests and the control of resources. Applied to community leadership crises in Anambra State, Marxist theory highlights how competition for economic, political, and social resources within local communities often fuels persistent disputes.

In many Anambra communities, leadership tussles, whether over chieftaincy stools, town union presidencies, or traditional recognition, are not merely cultural disagreements but contests over access to state patronage, development funds, and political influence. Community leaders often control strategic resources, including royalties, revenues from land sales, and recognition certificates issued by the state government (Umearokwu, & Musa, 2025). According to Marxist analysis, this situation reflects a struggle between elites and marginalized groups within the community, with each faction seeking to capture leadership positions for material advantage rather than communal welfare. For instance, conflicts arise when ruling families or

influential elites manipulate community constitutions and rotation principles to maintain dominance. This reflects Marx's concept of the ruling class shaping institutions to preserve its own interests. Similarly, state involvement in recognizing traditional rulers or town union executives further entrenches class divisions, as those aligned with political elites often secure legitimacy regardless of community consensus.

The consequences align with Marxist arguments about social contradictions leading to instability. Leadership crises in Anambra have produced factionalism, youth restiveness, and in some cases violent clashes, thereby undermining collective security and development. The theory thus helps explain how economic and political inequalities embedded within community structures fuel recurring leadership disputes. In this study, Marxist theory is relevant because it situates community leadership crises within broader struggles over resources, class power, and state influence, demonstrating that resolving these crises requires addressing underlying material inequalities rather than superficial reconciliation (Chukwuemeka, 2025).

Underlying political, economic, and socio-cultural factors driving community leadership crises in Anambra State

Community leadership crises in Anambra State are shaped by intertwined political, economic, and socio-cultural factors. Politically, the involvement of state governments in the recognition and withdrawal of certificates of traditional rulers and town union executives has intensified disputes. Scholars argue that successive governments in Anambra often interfere in local leadership matters to reward political loyalty, thereby politicizing what should be community-driven processes (Okoli & Uhembe, 2019). This aligns with the observation that politicians use traditional institutions as extensions of political patronage networks, fueling divisions within communities (Ezeani, 2017).

Economically, leadership positions in Anambra communities are increasingly seen as gateways to resources. Traditional rulers and town union leaders often control allocations from government, levies, and proceeds from communal lands. Udeh (2021) notes that competition over these resources drives leadership struggles, as individuals and factions seek to secure economic benefits through access to power. The monetization of leadership positions, including allegations of "buying" certificates of recognition, further entrenches corruption and conflict (Ojukwu & Onuoha, 2018).

Socio-cultural dynamics also play a significant role. Many Anambra communities operate on rotational kingship and leadership principles, yet disputes often arise when powerful families or factions attempt to circumvent these customs. Nwankwo (2016) highlights that failure to adhere to traditional rotation systems frequently triggers violent crises. Additionally, the erosion of indigenous dispute-resolution mechanisms has weakened the capacity of elders and traditional councils to resolve conflicts amicably, leaving room for prolonged crises and litigations (Ikejiani-Clark, 2017)

Community leadership crises contribution to insecurity, social division, and disruption of development in Anambra State

Community leadership crises in Anambra State have significant implications for insecurity, social cohesion, and grassroots development. Scholars argue that unresolved leadership tussles often escalate into violent confrontations involving youths, rival factions, and sometimes state security agencies. According to Okafor and Ofoegbu (2018), disputes over chieftaincy stools or town union leadership have led to clashes that result in loss of lives, destruction of property, and displacement of residents, thereby undermining communal peace and security.

These crises also deepen social divisions by polarizing communities along factional, kinship, or political lines. Ezeani (2017) observes that disputes frequently divide communities into rival camps, eroding trust and weakening the collective spirit needed for community development. In many towns, families or villages aligned with different leadership contenders become estranged, creating long-term animosities. This fragmentation not only undermines social harmony but also disrupts cultural festivals, communal projects, and traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms.

The developmental consequences are equally severe. Udeh (2021) notes that prolonged crises stall the implementation of community-driven projects such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, as rival factions contest control of communal resources. External investors and government agencies are often reluctant to site projects in unstable communities, further entrenching underdevelopment. For instance, in communities like Nawfia and Alor, leadership disputes have paralyzed town unions, preventing access to state grants and undermining local self-help initiatives (Ojukwu & Onuoha, 2018).

3. CONCLUSION

Community leadership crises in Anambra State are rooted in political interference, economic competition, and the erosion of socio-cultural norms governing succession and governance. These crises have far-reaching consequences, manifesting in insecurity, violent clashes, social fragmentation, and disruption of community-driven development initiatives. The findings shows that disputes often polarize communities, weaken trust, and discourage both state and private investments. The persistence of these crises underscores the need for reforms that depoliticize traditional leadership, strengthen community constitutions, and restore indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution. Only through such measures can stability, unity, and sustainable development be achieved in Anambra State.

Recommendations

- a. Anambra State Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Community Affairs should strictly enforce community constitutions on rotational leadership and succession processes, ensuring transparency in the issuance and withdrawal of certificates of recognition.
- b. Traditional Rulers Council of Anambra State should strengthen indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms by establishing mediation committees to handle leadership disputes before they escalate into violent crises.
- c. Nigeria Police Force (Anambra State Command) should create a dedicated Community Conflict Monitoring Unit to proactively identify and de-escalate factional disputes, preventing them from turning violent.
- d. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Faith-Based Organizations should initiate grassroots peacebuilding and civic education programs that promote unity, discourage violence, and sensitize communities on the dangers of politicizing leadership disputes.

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