

Chapter 6: Pre-Colonial Political Systems in Nigeria

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A political system can be defined as a set of interrelated and interdependent political institutions which interact and function with a set of norms and values under a social and economic environment to achieve the system's objective. A political system operates within a definite geographical area, and it is an autonomous entity (state). Before the British colonialism, there were many political systems in what is now called Nigeria, as each ethnic group was autonomous and organized its government according to its tradition and culture. The traditional political systems of the three major ethnic groups are representatives of numerous political systems which existed in the country. The Hausa/Fulani political system in the North represented the large scale state with centralized, absolute political authority. The Yoruba political system in Western Nigeria represented the large chiefdom where the ruler governed with a councils of chiefs, The Igbo political system in the East represented segmentary and fragmented political system in which political authority is shared by many political institutions. A detailed discussion of these three representative political institutions will reveal their features, similarities and differences.

6.2 THE HAUSA/FULANI POLITICAL SYSTEM

Historical Background

The traditional political system of the Hausa/Fulani was based on the Emirate system. The Emirate system has its origin in the Jihad. The Jihad is the Holy War which Shehu Othman Dan Fodio started in 1804. Before the Jihad, the Fulanis had been a subject race in the old Hausa Kingdoms. Shehu Othman was not happy with the Hausa rulers. He was a renowned Fulani Moslem leader. He accused the Hausa rulers of allowing the Moslem religion to be contaminated with pagan practices, which resulted in an explosive quarrel between him and the King of Gobir. Gobir then was an Hausa Kingdom. The quarrel ultimately led to the Fulani revolt that developed into a Holy War. The Hausa kingdoms were overthrown during the war by Shehu Othman and his men. He installed in place of Hausa kings, Fulani Emirs, and established his capital at Sokoto. He divided the kingdom into two Empires; gave the Western Empire to his brother, Abdullahi, the Emir of Gwandu to control while he controlled the Eastern Empire. The Emirs of the Western and Eastern Empires acknowledged the overlordship of Gwandu and Sokoto and paid annual tribute to the Sultan of Sokoto and the Emir of Gwandu respectively.

Features

The features of the Hausa/ Fulani political system are as follows:

- (a) The Hausa/Fulani political system was large in size, both in population and geographical area.
- (b) The system was hierarchically organized and the political authority of the state was highly centralized. The Emir exercised absolute authority within the emirate.
- (c) The Emir combined religious and political functions and thus, he was the religious and political leader of the Emirate
- (d) The system had a well organized and standing army that defended the emirate from foreign attack.
- (e) There was the system of direct taxation. This provided a viable source of public revenue.
- (f) The judicial system of the Hausa/Fulani political system was characterized by Sharia and akali. The Sharia is a body of Islamic laws which rigidly governed the administration of the Emirate. The alkali was a sole judge trained in sharia.

Structures and Functions

At the apex of the Hausa/Fulani hierarchical political system is the Sultan of Sokoto. The Sultan of Sokoto was the political and religious leader of the Hausa/Fulani political system. However, he delegated political and religious powers to the Emirs who exercised absolute political authority in the Emirate. The Emirate was the fundamental unit of organization of the Hausa/ Fulani system, hence the Emirate system.

- (i) **The Legislative Organ and Functions:** The Emir was the chief legislator of the Emirate. He was given the authority to make laws which were not covered by the Sharia. However, the Emir had no power to make laws which conflicted with the Sharia. The Sharia was applied throughout the Emirate and was regarded as the laws of God. Thus, they were seen as supreme laws. The Emir levied taxes on the citizens. He delegated the powers of making local rules to District Heads. However, just as in any delegated legislation, the Emir had the powers to set aside any local rules made by any District Head. The Emir did not govern with any council at all.
- (ii) **Executive Organ and Functions:** The political authority was vested in the Emir. He was an absolute and autocratic ruler. All executive powers of government were vested in him. He was a religious leader and in that capacity, ensured that Moslem laws were observed by the people. As we noted earlier, the Emir did not govern with any council. However, he was assisted in the executive functions of government by certain office holders who were assigned specific functions. These office holders were responsible and accountable to him. Some of the office holders that helped the Emir in the administration of the Emirate were as follows:
- (a) **Madawaki:** He was the chief commander of the cavalry (the army) and he was responsible for military functions of the State.
 - (b) **Waziri:** He was the Emir's chief official, a sort of Prime Minister. He served as the Emir's administrative adviser.
 - (c) **Galadima:** He was charged with various administrative duties. He was responsible for administering the Emir's capital.
 - (d) **Maaji:** He was the Emir's treasurer and was responsible for the finances of the Emirate.
 - (e) **Dogari:** He was the chief of the police who was responsible for the maintenance of law, order and security of the Emirate.



Fig. 6.1: An Emir

- (f) **Sarkin Fada:** He was the head of the palace officials.

The Emir was expected to consult his principal office holders in the business of government but he was not compelled to accept their advice. They were merely his official servants. The Emir ensured law, order and government within the Emirate.

It is important to note that even though the power of the Emir was said to be absolute and autocratic, it was limited by a number of factors. The Emir was guided in the operation of his government by the Sharia which was regarded as the Supreme law of Allah. The second limitation was his allegiance to the Sultan of Sokoto. He was responsible to the Sultan of Sokoto to whom he paid annual tribute to as overlord. The third limitation was the need to maintain good relations with the ruling families. He required the support of the ruling families to prevent the possibility of them ganging up to overthrow him. In any case, the Moslem religion indoctrinated the people that they should obey their superiors and their rulers without question. This belief reinforced the power of the Emir, ensured absolute obedience and loyalty to the Emir and guaranteed political stability.

- (iii) **Judicial Organ and Functions:** The head of the judiciary in the Emirate is also the Emir. The Emir's Court dealt with serious crimes. His court also settled all land disputes. The Emir is the controller of lands in the Emirate. The Emir also settled all cases arising from the administrative regulations which he made. The Moslem laws provided that all death sentences should be pronounced by the Emir. The Sharia governed the administration of the Emirate. There was an official who was trained in Moslem laws called *the Alkali*. The *alkali* sat as a sole judge to administer the Sharia. He had exclusive responsibility of administering Moslem laws. In other words, it was only the alkali who could adjudicate in all cases governed by Sharia since he was an official trained for such. There could be more than one alkali court in an Emirate. But the number of such courts varied from Emirate to Emirate. District and village heads also performed some judicial functions. They settled minor disputes of various types. They also punished people who violated the orders of the Emir within their areas of jurisdiction.
- (iv) **Administrative Units of the Emirate:** For administrative purposes, each Emirate was divided into districts. A district was administered by a district head known as *hakimi* who resided at the Emirate headquarters. The *Hakimi* was appointed by the Emir. He was therefore responsible and accountable to the Emir. He was charged with the responsibility of collecting taxes within his district, maintaining law and order and settling minor offences. A district consisted of a number of villages. The village administration was headed by a village head. The village head was charged with the function of maintaining law and order within the village, and ensuring that the directives of the Emir were carried out. He was also responsible for the collection of taxes. There were various forms of taxes, namely: cattle tax, land or community tax which was paid by individuals who used land in farming. The administrative structure of the Emirate is shown in the diagram below.

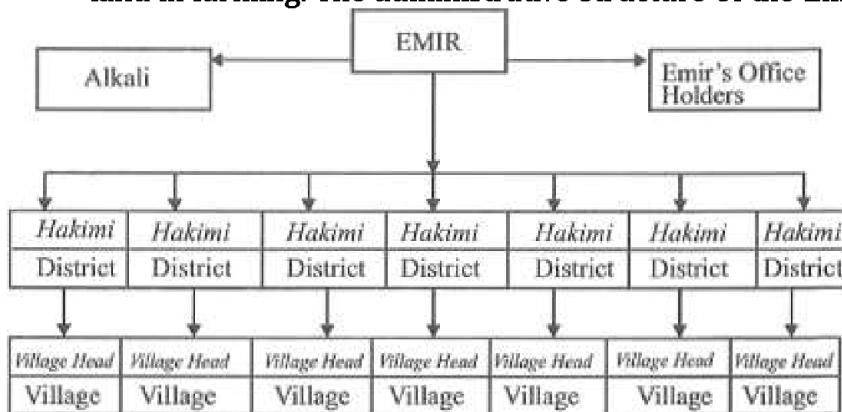


Fig. 6.2: The administrative structure of the Emirate

6.3 THE YORUBA POLITICAL SYSTEM

Historical Background

Before the coming of Europeans to Nigeria, the Yoruba political system extended to areas now known as Oyo, Ogun and Lagos States, and parts of Kwara and old Bendel States. The founding father of the Yoruba's is Oduduwa. Oduduwa, as legend has it, came from the East, conquered the people and first settled at Ile-Ife. Oduduwa had seven sons at Ile-Ife who later became the first seven kings in Yoruba pre-colonial political system. It was said that the Oba of Benin descended from one of the seven sons of Oduduwa. The seat of government later moved from Ile-Ife to Oyo which became the capital city of Oyo Empire. It was the most prominent Yoruba Kingdom on the arrival of the white men. Yorubaland was divided into fourteen kingdoms, each of which was ruled by an Oba. Consequently, all the Obas traced their descent through paternal line to Oduduwa.

Features

The Yoruba political system has the following main features;

- (a) The system was essentially a constitutional monarchy with the Oba as the Monarch. The Oba was not an absolute or authoritarian ruler. He ruled with a council of chiefs and depended on the advice of these chiefs.
- (b) The political system was large in size of its unit of government.
- (c) The political system operated with an in-built system of checks and balances which ensured that the Oba did not become despotic or autocratic. While the chiefs checked the Oba, the age grades checked the Oba-in-council.
- (d) The Oba was mainly a political leader. Other institutions performed the religious and spiritual functions of the State. There was a separation between political and religious roles and their performance.
- (e) There was no systematic form of taxation. The subordinate chiefs paid annual tributes in forms of labour, yams, kola and animals to the paramount ruler – the Oba. The people were never forced to pay any form of tax.
- (f) There was no standing, regularly paid army. The army was raised on ad hoc basis whenever the need arose.
- (g) There was no organized police force. Age grades and Ogboni society were utilized from time to time to enforce the decisions of Oba-in-council.
- (h) The Yoruba kingdoms were loosely linked with the Alaafin of Oyo. But with the breakdown and collapse of the Oyo Empire, the Yoruba kingdoms became fully independent and sovereign states.

Structure and Functions

There were wide variations in structure and functions among various Yoruba kingdoms. Nevertheless, certain fundamental elements appeared to be similar in the structure and functions of most Yoruba kingdoms.

We shall concern ourselves here with these fundamental elements. The Yoruba kingdom consisted of the Oba's town or capital city and the subordinate towns. The capital city was directly ruled by the Oba. But he ruled the subordinate towns through chiefs whose titles were *Baale* or *Oloja*. The *Baale* or *Oloja* and his subordinate chiefs conducted the affairs of the subordinate town. But such matters as the approval of the appointment of a new *Oloja* and the settlement of cases of murder and treason were referred to the Oba. The Oba's town or the capital city was divided into wards (*adugbo*). Each ward was administered by a chief (*Ijoye*) who was responsible for carrying out within the ward the orders of the Oba. He also allocated vacant lands and settled minor cases. Each ward was divided into walled compounds (*agbo ile*). Each compound comprised several lineages. A lineage is defined as a group of families who can trace their origin to a common ancestor. There were usually lineage heads (*mogaji*). We shall now turn to examine the various political institutions in the Yoruba political system.

(ii) **The Oba:** The Oba was regarded as a divine king in the sense that he traced his descent to the Oduduwa. Although his person was inviolate, he was not a despot. He was the ceremonial head of his kingdom and ruled through his council of chiefs. It was traditional that the Oba did not appear often in public. This was in accord with his sacred status. The Council of Chiefs was composed of his senior chiefs. The Council of Chiefs was called different names in different places. In Oyo Empire, it was known as Oyo-mesi, in Ijebu kingdom, it was Ilamuren, and in Ekiti, Ijesha and Ondo kingdoms, it was known as Iwarefa. The Oba-in-Council performed the legislative functions. The Oba did not sit with the council of chiefs to discuss state matters and make policies and legislations. Usually, the council of chiefs met and reached an agreement on political issues after consultations with other minor chiefs. The proposal was tabled before the Oba who then pronounced it as his decision and gave his royal seal to make the proposal a law binding on all his citizens.

The Oba was also the chief executive of the Yoruba kingdom. He executed the policies and enforced laws through

his chiefs. The Oba was also the head of the judiciary. The Oba had competence over serious offences in the kingdom such as murder and treason. He also settled cases involving two or more subordinate towns or wards. Offenders were punished by imposing fines, imprisonment and banishment while very serious offences such as murder and treason were punished by death. The Oba performed these judicial functions with his senior chiefs.

The Oba was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the kingdom. Consequently, he was responsible for the defense of the kingdom and its internal security. The Oba controlled the Baale or Oloja in the administration of the



Fig. 6.3: An Oba

subordinate town. The Olojas were appointed with the approval of the Oba who also had the power to remove them. The Oba received yearly tributes from his chiefs.

The Oba was checked by his chiefs from being an autocratic ruler. Whenever the Oba tried to be autocratic, the chiefs could cease from going to his palace or they could refuse to carry out his orders. In very serious cases, the chiefs could insist that he should commit suicide. The council of chiefs could as a last resort forcefully destool the Oba if he refused to commit suicide. Nevertheless, the Oba was not

merely a figure head without any political power in his kingdom. As a wealthy man, the Oba maintained a large force of slaves as body guards with which he could enforce his political authority. Backed by wealth, royalty, and wisdom, he can tremendously influence his council of chiefs. The Oba had the power to remove any of his chiefs for serious misconduct.

(iii) **The Council of Chiefs:** The council of chiefs acted as the chief adviser to the Oba. It constituted the main force behind the government of the kingdom. The council initiated policies and laws which were made by the Oba. The council of chiefs was composed of senior chiefs representing the various lineages that made up the town. The council advised the Oba on the imposition of taxes, waging of wars, making of treaties, allocation of lands, creation of new titles and other important policies affecting the kingdom.

The council of chiefs was responsible for executing and enforcing the decisions of the Oba. The council performed executive functions in the name of the Oba. The council of chiefs also exercised judicial functions with the Oba. They handled serious crimes such as murder. They also settled disputes among lineages, compounds and wards.

The council of chiefs acted as kingmakers. The council had power to elect a new Oba whenever a vacancy existed. The council must however consult other junior chiefs. The council could act as a check against abuse of power by the Oba. They could adopt various devices to achieve this purpose and prevent the Oba from becoming a despot. The chiefs could refuse to perform certain religious rites which by tradition and custom were considered necessary for the survival of the kingdom. Some measures could embarrass the Oba and force him to meet the demands of the chiefs.

(iii) **Age Grades:** Age grades are groups of people organized on the basis of age which seek to achieve social and political purposes. In the Yoruba political system, age grades were led by title holders, and were often utilized to implement the policies and directives of the Oba-in-Council. They were also used to enforce judicial decisions of the Oba and the council of chiefs. Age grades were also employed to maintain the internal security of the kingdom. Sometimes, they were utilized to defend the kingdom against foreign aggressors. Age grades also executed public works such as clearing market places, construction of pathways, etc. They served as checks on the Oba and the Council of Chiefs against possible abuse of power. They achieved this purpose by refusing to carry out the orders of the Oba and his council of chiefs.

6.4 THE IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEM

Features

The main features of Igbo political system are as follows:

- (a) The Igbo political system was essentially Republican. Those who held political office got the right to govern from the people. The principle of popular sovereignty governed the rulers.
- (b) The principle of democracy governed the entire political activities within the system. There were the principles of equality and egalitarianism. Individuals and groups participated equally in the process of government. The business of government was the concern of all.
- (c) The principles of checks and balances also existed in the operation of government. The village head, the Council of Elders, Ozo title society, Age Grades and women association each checked the powers of others.
- (d) The Igbo political system was structurally segmentary and fragmented. The village group "*Obodo*" or "*Ogbe*" was the largest political unit.
- (e) Political powers were not centralised or hierarchically organised. Political authority was shared by many political institutions within the system.

(f) In the Igbo political system, women played very important political roles within the system. They were well organised for the purpose of participating in the political process. They made and enforced rules, and executed decisions. They settled cases and served as effective means of political communication.

(g) Political institutions were not assigned specific functions each to the exclusion of others. A political institution could perform different political functions at various occasions. A women association could make laws at one time, or at times could execute and enforce laws, while at other times it could adjudicate cases. Moreover, functions were performed intermittently.

(h) Taxation was not in existence in the Igbo political system. Individuals were organized for public works like construction of village paths, clearing of paths and market places, construction of public meeting halls (Obi) at the place of the village head. In other words, taxes were paid in form of free labour by able-bodied men.

Structure and Functions

Administrative Unit: The government within the Igbo political system was organized under four levels namely: extended families, kindred, village and village-group. We shall now discuss these levels in detail.

- (i) **The Extended Family:** The extended family was the lowest political unit within the Igbo political system. The extended family in many cases lived in a walled compound. It was made up of a group of nuclear families that descended unilineally from a common ancestor. The oldest man in the extended family assumed the leadership of the family. He was the embodiment of the family. He performed educative, ritual, social and political functions. He represented the family in kindred and village meetings. He ensured that the decisions of the kindred and the village were implemented in his family. The head of the extended family who was usually called *Okpara* held the *ofo* of the family which was a symbol of authority. The *okpara* did not take decisions alone. Decisions in the family were taken in meetings of all its members. When a decision was taken, it was binding.
- (ii) **The Kindred or Umunnawas** composed of a group of related extended families. The members of a kindred traced their descent to a common ancestor. They occupied a particular geographical area. The size of kindred varied from place to place. The kindred were usually headed by the oldest man from the most senior family in the kindred. He held the *ofo* of the kindred. The authority of the kindred was derived from the *ofo* which he held. The powers of the *ofo* were derived from the fear of sanctions which the spirit of the ancestors could impose on any misbehavior. *Ofo* is a small piece of wood prepared with certain specifications from a particular wood and sanctified by certain rituals. The *ofo* was a symbol of authority and the holder used it to exercise the will of the ancestors. The *ofo* was passed from its holder when he died to the next oldest man. Thus, it was passed from generation to generation. The *ofo* was and is still sacred in Igboland. When a decision was reached in a kindred, the head of the family usually knocked the *ofo* on the ground and the people present replied: "yea" (which means we agree.) Thus, the decision was binding on everyone.
- (iii) **Village (Ogbe):** The village was composed of groups of kindred which were tied by communion kinship and occupied a definite geographical area. A village varied significantly in size from place to place. The village was led by a village head. The village head was the eldest man from the most senior kindred. Thus, he had his descent from the founder of the most senior kindred. The village head held the *ofo* of the village which was the source of his authority. Decisions affecting the village were taken democratically in meetings of the normal village presided over by him. The village was considered as the strongest and coherent administrative unit within the Igbo political system. In some places, the village constituted itself as the largest political unit. In such cases it was seen as a small autonomous community and performed all the functions of a village-group (town) and possessed the same status.
- (iv) **Village-group or Town (Obodo):** The village-group commonly termed *Obodo* was the largest political unit in Igbo political system. The village-group consisted of a number of villages whose members felt they belonged to a distinct group. The village-group was bound together by common

traditions and culture, common economic and social ties, and in many cases by common origin. The village-group or town was an autonomous community and exercised sovereign authority. Its size varied widely. While some were very small, numbering a hundred people, others were large, numbering up to thousands of people. The village-group performed all the functions of a sovereign state. It made laws, executed them and adjudicated them for the security and welfare of the entire village-group. Decisions affecting the village-groups were made in a meeting of the village group conducted democratically. The principles of equality and freedom of expression governed the entire political process. The eldest man from the most senior kindred of one of the villages based on the descent from the founder of the town was usually recognised as the head of the village-group assisted by other village heads within the village-group.

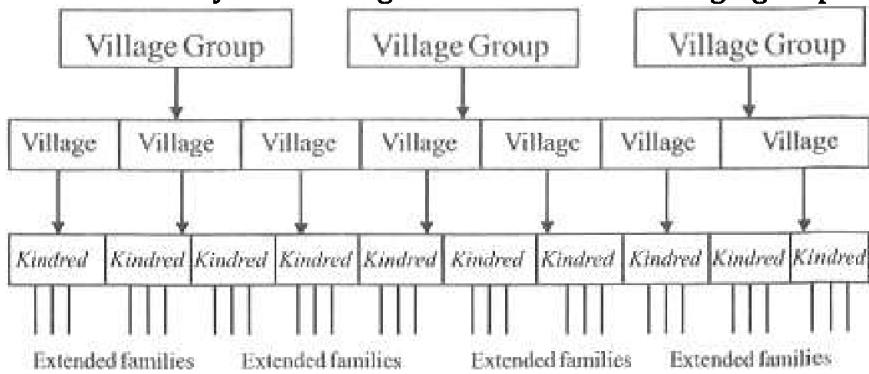


Fig. 6.4: The Organization of Igbo Political System

Political Institutions and their Functions: The governmental functions of the Igbo political system were shared by various political institutions. These institutions performed the functions of law making, law execution and law adjudication diffusely and intermittently. No particular function was exclusively performed by a particular political institution, except the holding of the *ofo* which was the preserve of the *Okpara*. We shall now discuss the main political institutions.

- (i) **The Village Head ("Okpara" or "Obi"):** The village head had various names in Igboland. In some places, he was known as *Okpara*; in some, he was called *Obi* while in the others, he was called *Igwe*. He was the head of the village or village-group (town). However, he exercised ceremonial powers. He was



Fig. 6.5: Obi of Onitsha

usually the eldest male of the senior kindred that descended from the founder of the town. The powers of the *Obi* or *Okpara* or *Igwe* varied widely from place to place. Much of his powers depended on the personality of the incumbent, the support accorded to him by his people, his wealth and wisdom. But in all the cases, the *Obi* or *Okpara* was a democratic ruler exercising only the powers the people would want him to exercise. He had no executive powers. He did not make laws or policies alone. He participated in law making during the meetings of the Council of Elders and the People's Assembly. He presided over the meetings of the two bodies. The meetings of the Council of Elders and Popular Assembly were conducted democratically. Whenever a decision was reached, the *Obi* or *Okpara* pronounced it to the people. The *Obi* or *Okpara* was regarded as the symbol of unity in the town. He maintained peace, order and good government.

- (ii) **The Council of Elders:** The Council of Elders comprised the eldest men drawn from each of the kindreds that made up the town. There were Councils of Elders in both villages and village-groups (towns). In each case, the Council performed the same functions. The council was presided over by the *Obi* or *Okpara*. The Council performed both executive and legislative functions. It deliberated on issues brought before it by individuals, women associations, Age-Grades, etc. Issues were properly debated and decisions were reached by consensus opinion. The Council made policies and laws for both the security and welfare of the people. The Council also performed judicial functions. It settled disputes between individuals and kindred. It settled land disputes and tried criminals. The Council had powers to impose punishments, such as banishment, fines, and death penalty. A person who committed an abomination could be sacrificed to an idol as a punishment. The Council ensured that all its decisions and those of the People's Assembly were executed. It employed the Age Groups for this purpose.
- (iii) **The People's Assembly:** In theory, the Assembly was a meeting of all male adults in a town. But in practice, the meeting was conducted by experienced elderly men within the community. The young people attended, observed and learned the art of politics from the older ones. Every adult had the right to express his opinion in the Assembly. The meeting of the Assembly was normally held at a public square near the *Okpara*'s residence. The meeting was not a regular one. Whenever a crucial issue arose which required the attention of the Assembly, the *Obi* or *Okpara*, after consultation with members of the Council of Elders, would order for the convening of the Assembly. The meeting was usually summoned by beating a wooden gong or drum or any other form of town crying. The gong was usually beaten at the night following the day of the meeting and also in the morning of the meeting day. The Assembly made laws for the community. It also adjudicated cases. Discussions in the Assembly were democratically conducted. But at the end of the discussion of an issue, the elders from all the kindred that made up the town would retire to a corner of the public square where they examined the issues more closely and reached a consensus. The consensus was then presented to the Assembly. The consensus reached by the elders was in most cases accepted unanimously. But where this was rejected by the Assembly, the elders would retire again to re-examine the issue. This would continue until their decision was acceptable to the Assembly.
- (iv) **The Age Grade:** The Age Grade was a group of young men of a town or village organized on age set. It was organized for the purpose of achieving social, economic and political goals. The main function of Age Grades was to implement decisions and enforce laws made by the Council of Elders and the People's Assembly. Age grades executed construction works and projects of environmental sanitation. They also protected village farmlands. They collected fees and fines levied by the Council of Elders. They were also used to protect the village-group (town) against foreign aggression.

Age grades also performed legislative functions. However, before any law made by Age Grades came into force, the Elders would have been fully consulted and would have given their consent. The approval of the Elders was always given once the matter was of public interest. Age Grades served as powerful pressure groups. They regularly articulated and aggregated interests within the Igbo political system. Age Grades also settled minor cases, particularly among their members. They could also punish offenders. Appeals against decisions of the Age Grades could be made to the Council of Elders or the *Okpara*.

- (v) **Women Association:** Women were all organised in the Igbo traditional society. They had two types of associations. The first was the Daughters of the Kindred (Umu Ada). The second one was the Married Women of the Village (Otu Omu). Women associations played leading roles in the settlement of disputes. They ensured that there was peace and order within the community. They also played leading roles in interests articulation. They articulated their interest and put forward their public needs and demands to the *Okpara* or *Obi*, Council of Elders, and the People's Assembly. They devised many strategies to ensure that their demands were met. Women associations also performed social functions. They socialized the young ones and infused desirable political norms and values in them. Women Associations also performed communication functions. They used market places and other meeting places to communicate to people about the policies, decisions, regulations and norms of the community. The women associations acted as checks against oppression, exploitation, dictatorship and bad government in the Igbo political system. The Aba Women Riot of 1929 demonstrated the significant roles women played in the politics of Igboland.
- (vi) **The Ozo Title Association:** The ozo title association was an association of titled men. The society was an association of very wealthy men in the society. Thus, the society was endowed with prestige, honour and respect. Moreover, the members were expected to be honest and disciplined men as they had a code of conduct which they observed very strictly. For instance, it was an abomination for a titled man to steal yam. Because they were distinguished men in the society, they performed important political functions. They also made rules which guided title taking in the town. They also made rules regulating the behaviour of title holders. The Ozo title associations also settled important cases and imposed sanctions. They ensured that there was high moral tone and good government within the community. They occupied an eminent political position and exercised great political authority within the Igbo political system as a result of their wealth, honesty and discipline.

COMPARISON OF HAUSA/FULANI, YORUBA AND IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEMS

S/NO	Criteria	Hausa/Fulani	Yoruba	Igbo
1.	Size of political system	The size of the Emirate was large.	The Oba's Kingdom was moderate in size.	The size of the village or town was very small. The units were fragmentary.
2.	Form of government	The system was absolute monarch. The Emir exercised absolute political authority.	The system was constitutional monarchy. The Oba-in-council exercised political authority.	The system was essentially republican. No single individual monopolized political authority. There was egalitarianism.
3.	Exercise of political authority	The Emir monopolized the political authority of the State which was highly centralized, hierarchical and authoritarian.	The Oba ruled through his chiefs on whom his political power depended.	The village head was a ceremonial head. Various political institutions shared the political authority of the State (town).
4.	Religion	The Emirate was a theocratic State.	There was a measure of	There was a distinction

		The Emir was head of the State (Emirate) and religion.	separation between religious leadership and political leadership.	between political leadership and religious leadership. Chief Priests held leadership positions in religious matters.
5.	Taxation	There was systematic taxation.	There was no systematic taxation. Tributes were paid annually to The Oba.	There was no systematic taxation. There was no system of tribute but the Okpara was entitled to free labour to cultivate his farm.
6.	Army	There was an organized standing and regularly paid army.	Soldiers were raised when the need arose. There was no regularly paid standing army	There was no standing army. Various kindreds contributed young men to the village force whenever there was war
7.	Law making	The Sharia governed the emirate administration. Laws which were not covered by the sharia were made by the Emir	The Oba-in-council made the laws for the Oba's Kingdom	The council of elders and the people's assembly made laws. But other political institutions participated in law making
8.	Law Execution	The office holders of the Emir, namely Madawki, Galadima, Waziri, Maaji, etc executed his laws and policies under his control	The council of Elders was responsible for the execution of the polices and laws of the Oba-in-Council	The Age grades executed the policies and enforced the laws under the control of the council of Elders. Other political institutions participated in policy execution and law enforcement
9.	Law adjudication	The Emir was the head of the judicial system. He dealt with the serious	The Oba and his senior chiefs tried very serious crimes	The main structure that adjudicated cases were the

crimes. The Sharia could only be administered by the Alkali. The Alkali sat as the sole Judge.	such as murder and had powers to sentence of death, imprisonment and banishment. Minor cases were settled by ward and lineage Chiefs.	Okpara, the Council of Elders and the Ozo title society. However, other political institutions sometimes participated in minor judicial functions
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

KEY POINTS

Hausa/Fulani Political System

Features

(i) The Hausa Fulani political system was large in size.

(ii) It was hierarchically organized.

(iii) The political authority was highly centralized.

(iv) The Emir exercised absolute authority.

(v) The system had a well-organized standing army.

(vi) There was a system of direct taxation.

(vii) The Emir combined both political and religious functions

and was a political and religious leader. (viii)The judicial system was governed by Sharia.

Structure and Functions

(i) Legislative Organ

The Emir was the chief legislator. He made laws which were not covered by Sharia. The Emir delegated some of his legislative powers to district and village heads.

(ii) Executive Organ

The political authority of the Emirate was vested on the Emir. He did not govern with a council. He was an autocratic ruler. The Emir was assisted in the administration of the Emirate by some office holders who were responsible and accountable to him.

(iii) Judicial Organ

The Emir was the head of the Judiciary of the Emirate. The Emir's Court dealt with very serious cases. The alkali sat as a sole judge to administer the Sharia. The Sharia is a body of Moslem laws. The alkali was a judicial official trained in Moslem laws. District and village heads settled minor cases.

(iv) Administrative Units of the Emirate

(a) The Emirate was administered by the Emir.

(b) The Emirate was divided into Districts, each headed by a Hakimi.

(c) Each district was divided into villages; each village was headed by a village head.

Yoruba Political System

Features

(a) The system was essentially a constitutional monarchy.

(b) The Oba was not an absolute ruler.

(c) The Oba ruled with a council of chiefs.

(d) The political system was large in size.

(e) The system operated with an in-built system of checks and balances.

(f) The Oba was only a political but not a religious leader.

(g) There was no system of direct taxation,

(h) The Yoruba system had no organized standing army and no organized police force.

Structure and Functions

Administrative divisions in a Yoruba kingdom

(i) The Oba's town was directly ruled by the Oba.

(ii) Subordinate towns were each ruled by an Oloja who was under the Oba and paid tributes to him.

(iii) The Oba's town was divided into wards,

(iv) Each ward was divided into compounds.

(v) Each compound was divided into lineages.

The Political Institutions

(i) The Oba: The Oba was a ceremonial monarch. He was not an autocratic ruler. He ruled with a council of chiefs. The Oba-in-Council performed legislative and executive functions of the Yoruba kingdom. The Oba was also the head of the judiciary and settled cases of serious offences. The Oba was checked by his council of chiefs from being an autocratic ruler.

(ii) The Council of Chiefs: These acted as chief advisers of the Oba. It was composed of senior chiefs representing various lineages that made up the town. The Council of Chiefs acted as king-makers as they elected a new Oba. The Council was responsible for executing and enforcing the decisions of the Oba-in-charge. It also performed judicial functions with the Oba.

(iii) Age Grades: These were used to implement the policies, orders and directives of the Oba-in-Council. They maintained internal and external security. They executed public works. They served as checks on the Oba and the Council of Chiefs.

The Igbo Political System

Features

(a) The system was essentially republican.

(b) The principle of democracy governed the entire political process within the system.

(c) There was the principle of checks and balances.

(d) The system was segmentary and fragmentary in structure.

(e) Political authority was shared by various political institutions. Political authority was therefore not centralized.

(f) Women played very important political roles within the system.

(g) Political institutions were not assigned specific functions to the exclusion of others.

(h) The system operated with the principles of equality and egalitarianism.

(i) Political functions were performed intermittently.

(j) There was no direct taxation.

Structure and Functions

Administrative units

(i) The extended family was the lowest political unit.

(ii) The kindred were composed of related families.

(iii) The village was composed of a group of kindred which were bound by common kinship and cultural ties.

(iv) Village group or town was the largest political unit in the Igbo political system. It consisted of a number of villages and performed all the functions of a sovereign state.

Political Institutions

(i) Village Head: He was given various names by various communities such as Okpara, Obi and Igwe. The village head was a titular head of the community. He presided over the Council of Elders and the People's Assembly where policies and laws were made, cases settled and meetings conducted democratically. He had no executive powers.

(ii) The Council of Elders: The Council of Elders comprised the eldest men drawn from each of the kindred that made up the town. The Council performed legislative, executive and judicial functions.

(iii) The People's Assembly: It was a meeting of all male adults within the town. It was not held regularly. It made policies and laws for the communities. It had the power to settle very serious disputes brought to it by the Village head and Council of Elders.

(iv) Age Grades: These were young men organized on the basis of age set. They implemented decisions and enforced laws. They articulated and aggregated interests. They had powers to make rules. They also settled minor disputes.

(v) Women Associations: There were two types - Married women of the village and daughters of the kindred. Women associations settled disputes. They articulated interests and served as powerful pressure groups. They made rules governing their members. They served as checks against oppression and dictatorship.

(vi) Ozo Title Society: It is an association of titled men. They made rules which guided title taking. They made rules governing the behavior of members. They settled serious cases and imposed sanctions.

SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Essay Questions

- 1. Discuss the functions and powers of the Emir within the Hausa/Fulani political system.**
- 2. What were the features of the Igbo political system?**
- 3. Compare and contrast the Yoruba and the Hausa/Fulani political system.**
- 4. What role did women play in the Igbo political system?**
- 5. What were the roles of the Council of Chiefs in the Yoruba political system?**

Objective Questions

- 1. The ruler of the Hausa/Fulani political system was a (an)**

- A. democrat.**

B. autocrat.

C. ceremonial monarch.

D. socialist.

2. The ruler of the Igbo political system was a/an

A. Despot.

B. Fascist.

C. titular head.

D. authoritarian ruler.

3. Women played very significant roles in the government and politics of

A. Igbo political system only.

B. Yoruba political system only.

C. Hausa/Fulani political system only.

D. Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo political systems.

4. The Emir in the Hausa/Fulani political system was controlled by

A. Council of Chiefs.

B. Alkali.

C. Sharia.

D. the people.

5. The ruling political authority in the Yoruba political system was

A. The Oba.

B. the Council of Chiefs.

C. the people's assembly.

D. the Oba-in-Council.

Answers

1. B

2. C

3. A

4. C