

## Research Article

# Relevance of Indigenous Political System in the Transformation of Nigeria: Special Focus on Kingship (Sarauta System) in Northern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Earlier than the coming of the British Colonial Administrators, Nigerian states have among others, some unique indigenous political systems that are institutionalized by respective independent states in the administration of the people. These systems though varied from one geo-political areas of the Nigerian state to another, they are seen as the most perfect political structures that contributed in the transformation and evolution of many states in the Pre-colonial Nigeria. While some maintained centralized and non-centralized systems of political administration, there are those without a formal state structure and manage to uphold a facially invisible political structure that are powerful in decision making process. As argued by Aliyu (2011), the types of political structures set up by the Hausa states of the Northern Nigeria under the Sarauta system and the other ones set up by the Yoruba people of the South Western parts of the country under the old and new Oyo Empire as well as the non-state structure of the Igbo people of the Eastern Nigeria represent varieties of leadership potentials that Nigerian states exhibited which out rightly attracted the British colonial administrators to conquer the country using the availability of the majority of its political and leadership potentials.

**Keywords:** Leadership, administration, political systems.

## Introduction

The traditional political systems developed in Nigeria have been in existence and in to practice for centuries and because of their relevance in addressing the socio-political and economic needs of the people, they are still considered most important and effective among the people even in the contemporary Nigeria of today. Maina (2014) argued, it would be difficult for the people of Northern Nigeria for instance to undermine the powers and relevance of the kingship system in Northern Nigeria because it has helped in forming the solid foundation for the sustainable human transformation of the people.

The contribution of the Emirate system of Northern Nigeria in the areas of security, judiciary, agriculture, community help and development services, education and social safety is still seen as point of reference today especially with the unending leadership crises in the country. As argued by Maina (2014), because the kingship system has allow for other functional powers to participate in the administration of the states, there were clear separation of power between all functional organs of the Emirate including judiciary, livestock sector, security, welfare, agriculture, religious matters and inter-group relations. This made it very visible in planning and execution of policies that are meant to cater for the societal needs of the people.

The centuries of transformations recorded by states under the Sarauta system in Northern Nigeria, did not only attracted the British colonial powers but led to the institutionalization of an Indirect system of political administration with a matching order for an extension of the rulership of the serving kings. Powerful Emirates of Kano, Daura, Zazzau, Zamfara, Katsina, Nupe, Katagun, Kanem Borno and Hadejia among others for instance were indirectly integrated in to the colonial leadership of the British government because of the quality of the political structures they have established centuries before the coming of the colonial powers Anka (2017).

Though Colonialism has brought in new changes in the political evolution of Nigeria, Sarauta system is still considered as option out of many changes instituted by the colonial powers because administration of people in Northern Nigeria in isolation of the traditional Kings and Emirs is virtually seen as impossible. They are still stakeholders in decision making process among people and played the most critical functions of policy coordination that even the structural democratic government cannot do without consulting them. Jibo (2009) argued, with all their legitimate powers the three tiers of governments in Nigeria has to resort to engaging traditional political institutions in critical decision making and execution of some policies on security, health, rural development, agriculture and commerce.

The objective of this paper is to among other things, make an over-view of the relevance of the kingship/sarauta system in the political transformation of Northern Nigeria. The paper adopted mixed methodology of literature review and field interview to enable us connect the past and present status.

### **Sarauta System: Origin and Transformation in Northern Nigeria**

Kingship or what many in Northern Nigeria termed as Sarauta system is as old as many political systems in the ancient Africa. The system developed hand in hand with the state creation. According to some historical views, Sarauta system is as old as 9<sup>th</sup> century AD with the emergence of strong Kingdoms and Chiefdoms. Anka (2017) argued, the emergence of Empires like Kanem Borno, Zazzau, Daura and many political cities of the Northern region of Nigeria signifies the political and social values Hausa people attached to the system in terms of accepting the social contract between them and government of the local authority.

It would be quite difficult to say this is the exact origin of where the sarauta system started in Nigeria. This is because there had been conflicting verdict as to which of the kingdom exist earlier than another. Not only that, stronger emirates and kingdoms exist hand in hand with each other practicing almost similar pattern of political administration. In general sense, the political maturity grown up by these emirates and kingdoms in the Northern parts of Nigeria dozen of century than now is a clear demonstration of the viability of the political structure.

Under the system for instance, the king is the head of the political structure and he has supreme power of decision making based on the professional advice he is offered by members of his council. Lawan (2019) argued, the king in an Emirate of Northern Nigeria is usually the head and he hold supreme powers to decide on quite a number of issues based on advice. Parts of his function also is to issue instruction and matching order to district, village and sectional heads who help him inspect policy execution in some domains. Added in to this there are other administrative aids that supported the king in deciding on critical matter of public interest. They include Waziri who wore the status of an adviser, Liman the spiritual head of the emirates who always guides the king on the religious position of every decision he takes. There is also Sarkin Fada who is in charge of the palace, Ubandawaki, in charge of

the palace horses, Sarkin Yaki, War Commander, Jekadiya the woman who transmitted messages to the palace, Sarkin Noma, head of farmers, Ardo, the head of Fulani herdsmen and also there is magatakarda Chief message deliverer, Sarkin Fawa, the head of vouchers as well as the Grand Mufti which many interpreted as Chief Judicial Adviser to the king. The functions of these people as captured by Lawan (2018), is what make the Sarauta system highly attractive among people.

Transformation under these types of structure is evident because each sectional head is given adequate space to advice and implement policies that are decided at the level of council resolution. Take for instance the role of Sarkin Noma in a typical Hausa community; he is responsible for coordinating farming activities from the beginning to the end of every farming season. He takes inventory of the record of harvesting, projection of possible hunger method of food preservation as well as coordinates the settlement of farmers-herdsmen clash. Not only that, he also coordinate strategies on agricultural revolution and annual agricultural festivals Zubairu (2018).

Take example of Sarkin Yaki “Chief Warrior” for instance; every political emirate within the context of Hausa land sees the position of Sarkin Yaki as the survival hope of the social security of the people. His function as captured by Adamu (2018) is to coordinate the security architecture of the state, arrange and lead the battle front as well as advice the emirate on the security and safety approaches to be set up. Same thing goes with the functions and duty of the “Grand Mufti” the Chief Judicial Adviser and Judge. Under each emirate in the northern Nigerian sub-regions, the ability of the king to restore justice and fairness among his people lies squarely with strength and capacity of his grand mufti who is believed to be well vast in the knowledge of Islamic Shariah and jurisprudence. Gimba (2018) argued, there was virtually relative confidence in terms of inter-personal relations as people of Northern Nigeria relied on the sincerity of the state judicial system in ensuring justice and fairness to all.

Criminal and civil cases are validly handled by the King in most of the emirate through the advice of the “Grand Mufti” who either handle cases directly on behalf of the king or advice the king during proceedings. In another testimony, Jafar (2018) argued, in the days preceding our colonial contact, judicial officers especially the Grand Mufti of most of the kingdoms and emirates in Northern Nigeria are the most confidential of the people hence everyone count on them in seeking for justice and redress on matters of civil and criminal concern. There is no corruption or favouritism and justice is ensured to whoever is deserved and throughout judicial proceedings in matters of criminal or civil concern people believes the verdict of the king or his Mufti is the extreme source of real justice.

Take also example of the office of Sarkin Fawa who is simply referred to in the Hausa traditional sarauta system as head of the vouchers. The traditional sarauta system has recognized virtually the functionality of the Sarkin Fawa as someone who takes charge of animal slaughtering. The relevance of the office of Sarkin Fawa is to ensure legitimacy in animal slaughtering as well as ensure that, stolen animals have not being supplied and sold members.

As captured by Gimba (2018) the traditional sarauta system has ensure there is political coordination in almost virtually all issues that affects the citizens of the state including vouchering and animal slaughtering. Many instances palaces uses the office of Sarkin Fawa to regulate disputes arising from purchase and supply of livestock, as well as issues involving the use of stolen animals for slaughtering.

When you look at the function of the office of the Ardo of Fulani the head of Fulani herdsmen for instance in the typical hausa social and political set up, one may see reasoning in why livestock development was more precious and economically adventurous among almost all hausa/Fulani family. The Ardo who is appointed by the king take charge of coordinating cattle ranching, and securing of allocated grazing areas for the purpose livestock development. Jafar (2018) argued, in those days because the kings in the hausaland considers livestock as important as agriculture, they empower the Ardo's and his Fulani people to carry out livestock grazing legitimately and also establish mechanism for disputes resolution between farmers and herdsmen.

In general case, traditional sarauta system has function effectively to champion the cause of transformation in the pre-colonial hausa states and up to the present time. This may be as a result of the coordination in the political structure of the system and also the semi-decentralized nature of the way responsibilities are shared among the actors. As argued by Jafar (2018) the success of the Sarauta system in the Northern parts of Nigeria can be seen from the level of reforms in terms of food security, coordination in security architecture of the people, community and rural development, respect for the constituted authorities, justice and fairness to people as well improvement in inter-group relations.

On the issue of food security, it is evident that long before now, kings in the traditional Hausa states are actively involved in the design and implementation of policies and on agriculture. This is because of the generic impression that a king cannot sleep in peace if his subject are hungry Gimba (2018). In the popular views, across all emirates and kingdom in Northern Nigeria, kings are the most active people that get involved in annual farming. They secured dozens of farming cadastral and engage the teeming unemployed youth as temporal labourers in their farms. Majority of what is harvested is also put to use for the purpose of the poor people and Islamic school pupils. This single attitude as captured by Hakeem (2018) influenced and motivates other people to get actively involved in to farming as the major source of wealth in their local domain. Also in the views of Gimba (2019), 90% of the rich people in the typical rural hausa communities in Northern Nigeria are renown farmers who invest almost substantial parts of their acquired wealth in to farming. This single culture of love for farming, helped states in Northern Nigeria in establishing a strong network of food security as analysis has shown that, majority of the teeming populace in the olden days Hausa land leaves in absolute food sufficiency. Under same system for instance, Hakeem (2018) captured that, there is no community in the Hausa state of Northern Nigeria one may go without tracing large hectares of farms belonging to extended families in what they referred to as Gandu "the big family farms".not only that, in every community in the Hausa state he added, there is an established irrigation farming network meant to support the annual food production and also targeted at reducing the level of unemployment among people.

On the aspect of the security architecture of the Hausa state, one may not run away from the simple facts that earlier than now, states in Hausa Land are 'sufficiently secured from internal security crises. Kidnapping, armed robbery, stealing and other internal social and economic crimes are for instance recorded in very small portion in Hausa Land in the olden days as everybody is known within the community and people took to themselves the responsibility of getting involved in security management of their localities. Anka (2017) argued, because of the coordination in the political structures of the Hausa States security network of communities are ensured through regular meeting with all stakeholders. Issues of security concern are regularly and timely reported to the palace and the king often consultation decide on those issues without any bureaucratic bottleneck. Unlike now economic activities

including transportation across one community to the other are done in broad day light and in the night and people within the community confide with each other with relative ease. Because of the sincere nature of the political system, some distinguished people in almost every community volunteered to join the unified vigilante group who are primarily in charge securing the community and ensuring enforcement of law and order among citizens. Anka (2017) argued, sarauta system came up with the most organized community security structure which gives people high hope of having adequate security of their lives and property. They are usually operating under supervision of Sarkin Yaki who briefed the palace on the major happenings around security and safety of the people and community in general.

Community and rural development is also another dimension of the transformation of Northern Nigerian states under the Sarauta system. Because the political structure is community base, the system allow for the promotion of the extensive community development especially on infrastructural development, agriculture, and also security. Gimba (2018) argued, traditional hausa state has one of the finest system of community development and because of the mighty of the king, he is basically in support of community transformation, people took often themselves to embark on feeder road construction and rehabilitation, massive community water project, construction of prayer mosque and Islamiyyah schools, water project and even support extended families in shelter development. Again, the manners at which people and indeed communities in Northern Nigeria respect the powers of the constituted authority remain a proud of the success of the Sarauta system in Northern Nigeria. It might either be because of the influence of the Islamic religion or the traditional cultures, people take any instruction and matching order from the king like a spiritual revelation which must be complied. The manners at which people bowed to the ground to greet the king represent a good ground of the spiritual powers of the kings. Anka (2017) argued, kings are seen as mini gods hence their subjects offered them un-estimable respect especially looking at the manners they bowed down to greet them, they paid them homage and also received their instruction with utmost sense of spirituality. On Sallah and during other festivities, the traditional horse riding and community tower by kings in typical state of Northern Nigeria attracted high sense of leadership maturity as immediate instruction are issued by the kings and people takes order unprepared just to maintain coordination in the system. In the other views of Jafar (2018), a typical Hausa man in Northern Nigeria is brought up to respect constituted authorities.

On justice and fairness, it was always argued that, Northern Nigerian states have one of the best judicial systems which are directly under the watch of the seating king. In the views of Jafar (2018) not later than now, many people in the rural areas prefer going to report civil matters to the Grand Mufti or an Islamic Shariah court directly situated at the palace. Most a time during those days, kings handled conflict resolution related issues inside his palace and parties accept the verdict without even attempt for appeal.

### **Kingship (Sarauta System) in the Contemporary Nigeria: Functions and Challenges of Modernization**

In this contemporary era of democratization process globally, not many believed traditional political systems are still relevant in ensuring socio-economic and political transformation especially in countries like Nigeria. This is however because, even the extant laws of the land, tried badly to weaken the powers of traditional political institutions in decision making process and outright policy implementation. But like Aliyu (2016) argued, the practice of alternate system of democracy and even militarism has failed to ensure total elimination of the traditional institutions in Nigeria's governance cycle. He added this argument is evidently



confirmed from the roles played by traditional kings in the contemporary Northern Nigeria in the area of polio eradication, security management, politics and election as well as community development.

In specific, the colonial transition and indeed the emergence of first indigenous independent government in Nigeria in 1960 constitute the beginning of the diminishing status of the traditional political institutions especially the sarauta system in Nigeria. As argued by Aliyu (2016) while the extent laws puts the roles of traditional kings to mere ceremonial status, they were made to be answerable to local government council chairmen who provide the means for the payment of their monthly salaries, allowances, and money for housekeeping as well as approve even their travelling request out of their locality. This development creates unnecessary crises and conflict of interest between the political office holders and kings which sometimes lead to their removal. Anka (2017) argued, because of the diminishing status of their powers, an ordinary local government council chairman can institute the process of the removal of a historic king on matters of political interest without mincing his overwhelming status on the people of his immediate constituency.

Further to this development is that even though the tradition allows for the council of king makers to decide selection and appointment of a king including his district and village heads, such supremacy has been shortchanged with the new executive clause that even after the selection, names of three preferred candidates needs to be sent to the executive Governor through the local government council Chairman or as the case may be Ministry for Local government and Chieftaincy Affairs for ratification. As argued by Marafa (2018) appointment of kings and their subordinates are no longer the way they are done in the traditional Hausa political set up because even though the council of kingmakers who are the permanent councilors of the palace are in the better know of the procedure for the appointment of a new king, their selection criteria is sometimes influenced by some political decisions.

In addition to this also, modernization and political influence also led to the politicization and adulteration of appointments by cleverly creating titles that are of not relevant to the political structure of particular state. In some special circumstance for instance, politicians and political office holders take advantage of their position to influence their appointments in to the status of permanent and non-permanent councilors of the palace even where history disconnects them with the political lineage. As argued by Marafa (2018) before now appointment in to the membership of a palace in traditional Hausa political structure is usually done in consideration of vacancy, historical lineage, competency, strength and acceptance by the people. Today all those criteria's are set aside by the overzealous politicians. This single factor also led to the emergence of new titles that are either new or not known to the political history of the people. As argued by Marafa (2018) titles such as Yandaka, Koguna, Kachalla, Sansani, Mualledi, Kaigama to mention but few were introduce even when they are not known to the public.

Financial incapacitation is also another factor that is affecting the functions of the sarauta system in Northern Nigeria. Before now or precisely before the independence emirates in Northern Nigeria and indeed palaces of kings are deeply involved in revenue generation and management especially with the popular tax collection of "Jangali" and other forms of revenue collection, kings take advantage of the availability of funds to initiate ideas that addresses immediate infrastructural need of community development. They use the availability of the funds also to initiate annual traditional festivals which further help in

showcasing the strength of the traditional and cultural alienation of the people. As argued by Marafa (2018), because the palaces of the Emirs and Kings are incapacitated financially, they found it difficult to uphold some traditions of horse riding for instance, agricultural show, cultural festivals among other things could not be sustained due to financial incapacitation.

### Conclusion

This has succeeded in reviewing critical issues that led to the transformation of Northern Nigerian states especially centuries before the advent of the colonial powers in Nigeria. While it succeeded in highlighting key issues that influenced the success of the transformation, it also explains in details the influence of modernization in the diminishing status of the sarauta political system in Nigeria. With the highlight however, it is evidently clear that, even with the dominance of democracy as a uniform political structure adopted by Nigeria, kingship or Sarauta system is considered as one of the most existing political system that can be used hand in hand in ensuring political stability in Nigeria.

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