

IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Igbo political system may be seen as a fragmented political system. Many institutions were in place and political authority was shared among them. For example, the Ofo title holders (council of elders), Ozo title holders and age grades were all involved in the power sharing exercise. No wonder then that, the term "Acephalous", was ascribed or used to describe the political organization of the Igbo political system. There was the absence of centralization of power and authority in Igbo political system as it was more of the people's direct participation in their government (Direct democracy).

THE STRUCTURAL ORGANISATION OF IGBO POLITICAL SYSTEM

1. Village administration: The Igbo political system was based on the village as a political unit. Each family head held the Ofo title and all of them put together formed the council of elders. The council governed the village. At the village meetings, every adult is expected to participate. Among the Ofo title holders, one of them was recognised as the most senior to others. He was referred to as the okpara and has the right to preside over the council of Elders meetings, where issues affecting the people were discussed and implemented.

2. The age grade: These were young men that belonged to the same age group, and they perform the following functions:

(i) Administration

(ii) Performance of public duties: as clearing of paths, construction of roads, markets etc.

(iii) Defence of the village

(iv) Maintenance of law and order

(v) Implementation of policies

(vi) Abuse of powers

(vii) Ceremonial and cultural functions

3. The executive: The affairs of the village are discussed from time to time by family Heads (council of elders). Every adult has the power to contribute.

4. The legislature: The villagers made laws themselves and even the age-grades can enact a law which the elders would accept.

5. The judiciary: this area, family heads settled disputes between families. Serious cases were referred to the council of elders presided over by the Okpara and penalties were metted out to those who committed serious offences like murder, stealing etc.

6. The Ozo title holders: Some wealthy and influential men took this title which was very expensive. This title makes the holder to be recognised in the society and could then preside over meetings on issues affecting the community with elders.

7. Provision of shrines: Shrines were provided and was seen as having political significance in providing bonds of unity and communities.

8. Leadership: Succession to leadership positions was not hereditary in Igbo political system.

FEATURES OF THE IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES

1. Religious and judicial powers: The village priest/diviner wielded great deal of religious and judicial powers.

2. Leadership: Succession to leadership and to prominence was based on personal achievements.

3. Bonds and unity: Deities are of political significance in providing bonds of unity.

4. Market square: It served as the village chambers.

5. Socio-political group: The women (Umuada) composed of the first daughter of each family, constituted a socio-political group.

6. Banishment: Banishment from the village and escort of such people into the evil forest was the maximum judicial punishment.

7. New Yam Festival: This was religiously marked, honoured and celebrated annually.

