

## Appraisal of Sultan Muhammad Bello's Political thought as Stated in Usūl As-Siyāsah

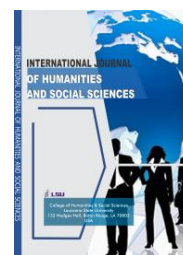
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### Abstract

*The study aims to shed light on the political ideas presented by Sultan Muhammad Bello, a prominent 19th-century Nigerian Islamic scholar and leader. The paper intends to explore his concept of governance, understanding of the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and his vision for a just and prosperous society. It also explains a comprehensive understanding of Muhammad Bello's ideas and their influence on political systems and governance structures in the region through critical examination and interpretation of key concepts and themes, such as justice, leadership, and the role of religion in governance. It also delves into the political thought of Muhammad Bello as elucidated in his work, Usūl As-Siyāsah, exploring his ideas on governance, justice, and the role of religion in politics and help with valuable insights into seven principles and its implications for contemporary political systems.*

**Keywords:** Muhammad Bello, Political thought, Sultan, Siyasa, Usul.

### I. Introduction

Muhammad Bello was a prominent figure in the history of Sokoto Caliphate, and was not only a respected leader but also a prolific writer whose works have had a lasting impact on the political landscape of the region. One of his most significant contributions to political thought is his book, Usūl As-Siyāsah, which is a comprehensive treatise on the principles of governance and the duties of leaders. The paper, explores the key ideas in Muhammad Bello's political thought as expressed in Usūl As-Siyāsah. And also examines his views on the nature of power, the role of the ruler, and the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Through this analysis, the paper sheds light on the legacy of Muhammad Bello's political thought and its relevance to the challenges of governance in the modern world.

The Usūl As-Siyāsah laid the fundamental principles for a system of government that developed in diverse regions of the Bilad As-Sudan, the highlands of Abyssinia and the Kiswahili coast, reaching its formative period in the 10th century A.H. (15th century C.E.) in the Upper Niger Bend and in the Haraar highlands of Abyssinia. (Shareef 4)

### Islamic Political Thoughts

The ideas and philosophy of Islamic scholars who have excelled in the Islamic scholarship and politics is referred to as the Islamic Political thought. The thought of such scholars has also been subsumed or rather encapsulate as a course of study in the various academic citadel of learning. The articulated ideas of Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Batuta among others have been immense to the development of Islamic Political thought. (Abdullahi, 4)

### Jihad

Jihad is originally an Arabic word “struggle” or “effort” in Islam, a meritorious struggle or effort. The exact meaning of the term jihād depends on context; it has often been erroneously translated in the West as “holy war.” Jihad, particularly in the religious and ethical realm, primarily refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad>)

Jihad also means to wage a holy war on unbelievers that wage a war against Islam. It also implies a continuous strive to live a moral and virtuous life by the individual. The Sokoto Jihad waged

by Dan-Fodiyo in 1804 was meant to purify Islam among Hausa rulers who were accused of mixing the Islamic religion with pagan practices. (Abdullahi, 4)

### **Leadership**

Leadership is the position of a person responsible for showing how to determine group decisions towards the right goals. Therefore, the leader must work hard to influence others to accept the decisions and instructions determined to achieve the goals of the group or organization. (Salamun and Rahman, 3)

### **Leader**

A leader is someone with a vision and the path to realizing it. A leader is someone who ensures their team has support and tools to achieve their goals. (<https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-a-leader-and-how-do-you-become-one>) Abdullahi 5, shows how The International Encyclopaedia of social science vol. 9 and 10 (1968), operationalize the term leader in the following phrases. "A leader is one who is repeatedly perceived to perform acts of living. The term leader has traditionally implies a person clearly distinguished from others in power status, visibility and in any number of character traits each as decisiveness, courage, integrity and intelligence", a leader is "a person who occupies a position of high level responsibility". (Abdullahi, 5)

### **Leadership in Islam**

In Islam, leadership describes a person or a group of people who guide and lead followers or mankind from the brink of destruction to the path of Allah. The Qur'an (the Holy Book) and the Sunnah (the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)) are the sources that determine the complete code of life for Muslims, including matters related to leadership. The leadership framework in the West is bound by rules and conditions, which are considered official duties to implement. But Islam regards leadership as a responsibility entrusted to be exercised to the followers or mankind. God's rules and commandments are carried out with the cooperation of leaders and followers. (Salamun and Rahman, 3)

### **Background to Sokoto Caliphate**

The Sokoto Caliphate was an independent Sunni Muslim Caliphate in West Africa that was founded during the jihad of the 1804 by Usman dan Fodio. It was abolished when the British conquered the area in 1903 and established the Northern Nigeria Protectorate. The caliphate linked over 30 different emirates and over 10 million people in the most powerful state in the region and one of the most significant empires in Africa in the nineteenth century. The caliphate was a loose confederation of emirates that recognized the suzerainty of the Amir al-Mu'minin, the Sultan of Sokoto. The caliphate brought decades of economic growth throughout the region. An estimated 1-2.5 million non-Muslim slaves were captured during the War. Slaves provided labour for plantations and were provided an opportunity to become Muslims. Although the British abolished the political authority of the caliphate, the title of sultan was retained and remains an important religious position for Sunni Muslims in the region to the current day. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad>)

### **History of Muhammad Bello**

Muhammad Bello was the second Sultan of Sokoto born 1780 or 1781 in Gobir, died 1837 at Wurno and became the first Sultan of Sokoto after the death of his father while some historians said that he was born in the town of Marnona in modern day Niger. (<https://siiasi.org/digital-archive/sultan-muhammad-bello>)

He was also an active writer of history, poetry, and Islamic studies. He was the son and primary aide to Usman Dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto caliphate.

He grew under the care of his father, the Shaikh Usman bin Fodio and his Uncle, Abdullahi Ibn Fodiyo, who were two of the most prominent scholars of the time. Bello was gifted with intelligence, understanding, wisdom, retentive memory, eloquence and mastery of Arabic language such that within short time, he reached a certain stage of learning which could not have been reached by anyone else in a long period. (Hassan, 8)

Bello had studied the various branches of learning known in those days under the supervision of various scholars. Under Abdullahi, Bello studied numerous subjects such as Arabic language, the

principle of theology. Perhaps, one of Bello's greatest teacher was Muhammad Ibn Muhammad al-Wankari, who taught Bello for twenty years. (Dass & Ibrahim, 9)

### **His Appointment as Sultān of Sokoto**

On Friday 20th April, 1780CE Bello's father, Shaikh Uthman bin Foduye died, then Shaikh Muhammad Bello was thirty years old. There were series of demonstration against sharing of power at Mafara (Zamfara state Nigeria) led by a person called 'Danbaiwa'. When Shaikh Abudllahi bin Foduye, Bello's uncle heard the news, he and his nephew Muhammad Bello headed to the town and waged a war to bring Danbaiwa down and to check his activities. They fought and succeeded in defeating him. This incident resulted in confirmation of Muhammad Bello's appointment as the successor of his father Shaikh Uthman bin Foduye (May Allah have mercy on him) (Qāsiyūnī, 19).

### **Praise of Ulama' (Muslim scholars) on him**

Muhammad Bello received praise and honor from many dignities among them is his father Shaikh Uthman bin Foduye who said that people should take to the reading of the works of his son Muhammadu Bello for their spiritual, moral and educational benefits to the Muslims (Ibn Foduye, 17). Shaikh Gidado bin Lema said: Muhammad Bello became a sign of Allah on the earth and an undisputable figure of Islam (Lema, 3).

Sauri and Sa'id (237) Said: According to Shaikh Qaribullah Bello was very intelligent and of good character. He was very intimate with his father which facilitated his acquiring of lot of knowledge. He participated in most of the Jihads waged by Uthman bin Foduye in his bid to reform Islam (Kabara, 169).

In line with this statement, Shaikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi added that:

*Leader of the faithful (i.e. Muhammad Bello) grew up in the house of Awliya (Saints), under the custody of his father Shaikh Uthman and his uncle Abdullahi bin Foduye. For this reason, it is difficult to get someone who attains his status in Islamic scholarship, despite being engaged in Jihad (wars), politics and tours for preaching Islam. (Bello, 22).*

### **Concept of Politics in Islam**

The word politics in Arabic is referred to As-Siyāsah. The word attracts different interpretations. The word as-Siyasah is derived from the Arabic word "Sasa", "Yasusu" "Siyasatan" which carry the meaning "to take care". If the word is used for human affairs, it means "to administer their affairs". (Kachkar, 4)

The word "Siyāsah" will mean "the art of government" as derived from the saying of the Prophet (PBUH). narrated by al-Bukhari (1987) and Muslim (1990):

كانت بنو إسرائيل تسوسهم الأنبياء

The Children of Israel were administered by the prophets.

Furthermore, based on this hadith, the classical Muslim scholars defined Siyāsah as "the art of governance" that all government policy makers must possess.

The scholars understood the literal meaning of this root word differently, thus, its meanings depend on the concept of its usage. The word politics (as- Siyāsah) simply means activities of people that brings them closer to what is beneficial and keeping them distance from evils. Similarly a contemporary scholar in the field of jurisprudence)

Shakir 6, viewed politics as composition of Islamic laws, from either revealed message or through analogy (Ijtihad) which guides to what is beneficial and goodness to the entire Muslims as well as preventing them from evils. Taimiyyah (Vol.28,244 ) also viewed politics as comprising all the laws that are related to safeguarding trust of a state and its treasury, establishing justice and abiding by the rules and regulations of Allah (S. W.T.) on the rights of human beings.

In all the above views of the Muslim scholars lay emphasis on the importance of keeping trust of the community, state or nation to the person entrusted with, as well as commanding the subjects to what is right and acceptable before Allah (S.W.T.) in order to establish tranquillity in the society which attract blessings and mercy of the Creator. Politics in Islam (both in form and practice) is totally a different phenomenon from that of the Western thought and ideas. Islam can never be separated from socio-economic and political life of the society. This is because it provides a complete guidance for the betterment of all human beings in this world and the hereafter. In Islam, sovereignty

belongs to Allah (S.W.T.) the Creator, Sustainer, and the Controller of the universe. Political terminologies such as democracy, equally means to organize and control an affair. Muslim liberty, equality have special meaning and historical significance to the Western scholars of political thought; their meanings and significance contradict the understanding of the Muslims. In Islam, the concept of politics emphasizes that all power belongs to Allah (S.W.T.), He is the Master and Ruler over the affairs of Islamic state, therefore, and leaders in such states are termed to be Allah's vicegerance on the earth. The relationship between Allah (S.W.T.) and the Ummah is that of the Master (Ma'abud) and the servant (Abd). These two terms were used in the following verses of the Glorious Qur'an:

*Truly! This, your Ummah (Shari'ah or religion (Islamic Monotheism) is one religion, and I am your Lord, therefore worship Me (Alone) (Q42:92).*

In other verse the Qur'an states:

*There is none in the heavens and the earth but comes unto the Most Beneficent (Allah) as a slave (Q19: 93)*

In an Islamic state, there is no separation between the religious and worldly affairs. The two are indivisible; both religious and worldly matters are ruled, controlled, and regulated by Allah (S.W.T.) Who legislates and approves laws. So, Islamic legislations cut across all facets of life in the state affairs. It determines what should be and how it should be. Both the ruler and the ruled are equal before the law of Allah (S.W.T.). Leadership and power to control is a great blessings of Allah (S.W.T.) because a just and trustful leader has a great reward from Allah (S.W.T.), as in the narration of Abu Hurayrah (R.A.) the noble Prophet (PBUH.) said:

*Seven people Allah will shade them under His shade a just leader ... (Bukhari Vol.2, No.660).*

Leadership is highly significant and hence Allah (S.W.T.) commands to the establishment of leadership in every stratum of people. In this view, al-Jazriy (n.d) stated that scholars are unanimous that leadership is compulsory in Muslims community; there must be a leader in every community who is responsible for the establishment of religious rites and to safeguard people from all forms of transgression. In the Hadith the noble Prophet (PHUH.) said:

*After me governors will rule over you and those who are upright will rule you by their uprightness and those who are corrupt will rule you by their corruptness: listen to them and obey them in everything which is compatible with truth, if they are correct in their dealings then it will be your benefit and theirs, and if they act incorrectly then that will still be to your benefit (in the next world), but will be held against them. (Bukhari Hadith no: 4765).*

Islam warns leaders against any injustice and oppression on the weak members of society. But authority can be exercised on those who commit crime and violate the rights of Shari'ah. Allah (S.W.T.) commands:

*The blame is only against those who oppress people and those who commit wrong-doing and insolently transgress beyond bounds on earth shall be severely punished (Q 42: 42).*

The essence of leadership in establishing justice and rights made it obligatory on every leader to squash oppressors and their activities if it is the only means to establish cordiality in society. The Qur'an defines the function and role of leadership through justification of the use of force and weapon. Allah (S.W.T.) says:

Verily we have sent our messengers with clear signs and revealed with them the Book and the Scale (of judgement) so that people may be firm in justice and we provided iron, wherein is mighty power and many uses for mankind and that Allah shall know who will help Him and His messengers in the unseen... (Q 57:25).

Ibn Taymiyyah says, whoever deviates from the Book shall be corrected by Iron. Leaders according to Islamic political system are the successors of the Prophet (PHUH.) and should therefore, put all their efforts in ensuring justice prevail in their communities, and should try to stop and prevent all forms of oppression within and outside their leadership. Thus, security of life and properties of citizens becomes paramount in an ideal leadership style. (Ahmad 108-113)

## **II. Results and Findings**

### **Muhammad Bello's Political Thought In Usūl As-Siyāsah**

It was established that the "Usūl As-Siyāsah" or the Principles of Politics written by Muhammad Bello in 1906 - 07 was at the request of Umarun Dallaji, the first Fulani Emir of Katsina after it was captured (Yamusa, 9).

It was a form of letter of advice on how the ruler, the subjects and the state public servants should conduct themselves in line with the norms of the Sharia - the Islamic legal system. It was an attempt to teach these categories of people, their rights and obligations towards the State.

The work can be divided into three segments: The first section focuses on the high authority of the State i.e. the Imam or the Emir or the Governor, while the second and the third focus on the officials of the State and the common people respectively.

As for the ruler, he should be pious and far from liking leadership for its pleasure, otherwise, he will be inclined to use his position to achieve his personal interest. The rulers should keep the company of good scholars who will not hide the truth from him for fear of his displeasure and must be intent on listening to their advice. He must be generous, tolerant and always ready for self-sacrifice or else his people will desert him.

The rulers should provide public amenities for his subjects by encouraging all sorts of legitimate trades. Fortresses, bridges, markets, roads should be constructed and maintained to improve the prosperity of the State. As for the common people, they should realize that their conduct will certainly reflect on the conduct of the ruler. If they behave well, Allah will cause their rulers to have sympathy for them. But if on the other hand, they misbehave, Allah will cause their rulers to ill-treat them. (Dass & Ibrahim 14-15)

### **Description of Kitab Usūl As-Siyāsah and the Seven Principles of Politics**

Muhammad Bello discussed politics in Islam and realized there are seven principles fundamentally embedded in the all-encompassing meaning of justice. For politics, in essence, means justice and nothing more. Of these seven principles two are related to the ruler (Amir), the governor (Waalii) and the leader (Imaam). Two are related to the administrators and the government officials. The last three are related to the subjects.

### **Seven Principles**

They all signify the meaning of justice.

The first principle contains the six qualities of a ruler: (1) Pious (2) Follower of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). (3) Concerns with the affairs of the hereafter (4) Free from temporal desire and for liking leadership, let alone being interested in rulership (5) that leadership should not be given on one who seeks it (6) forbid asking for it unless one is called upon, because of his leadership qualities and he has something good to offer the society (Swaine, 105).

The second principle is that the leader should have these qualities: The person to lead should be kind; More inclined to forgiveness than anger, Generous, persevering and tolerant, Good nature to sacrifice self, Brave, courageous, unshakable and firm in temper as well as steady – support to his employees and subjects

The third principle is that ruler should always yearn for religious scholars and be a desirable listener to their advice.

The fourth principle consists of conditions qualifying whoever wants to hold public office. To this end, justice is considered as a condition for qualifying whoever wants to hold public office. He is to choose state employers from his good person. (Hamid & Uyuni 1-26).

The fifth principle is that leader should command his subjects to do justice, be generous and avoid doing wrong.

The sixth principle is about maintenance of Islamic state. The leader should work and attract the survivors of artisans and encourage industry. He should provide security, transportation, market and general prosperity. (Rabiu & Ahmad 32-47).

The Seventh Principle. Every ruler (amir), governor (waaliy) and leader (imaam) should treat his subjects while associating with them with gentleness. This means that he should induce the people of distinction from among his subjects to all excellent spiritual ranks, each commensurate with his state.



Bello himself was tempted to seek for leadership contrary to his teachings, because when Usman Danfodio died in 1817, he ascended the throne without waiting for nomination or selection by the relevant bodies, particularly by Shaikh Abdullahi Sokoto. Also, Bello declared one eminent scholar Abdulsalam as an “apostate” for not recognizing Bello’s authority/ascendency to the throne. Bello fought and defeated him at a battle in Zamfara shortly after his ascension to the throne (Dass Sulaiman 105).

Bello insisted that the leader must not exhibit “favouritism” and by extension “God-fatherism”, “tribalism” or “quota-system” in the choice and or recruitment of public servants. A quality favoured by Bello is selecting state officials based on persons’ fear of God and knowledge. The merit system of today is not different from what Muhammad Bello called for. Modern bureaucracies as conceived by Marx Weber are structured and vacancies are filled by qualified persons having acquired certain level of training. What obtains today especially in Nigeria is bureaucracy filled with mediocre and corrupt officials partly because they did not merit the position. In addition, the advocacy of merit system calls accountability and transparency which Muhammad Bello strongly emphasized. Nigerian leaders and those of Africa and other third world countries are clamouring for accountability from public servants. Bello had advocated for that, more than 100 years ago (Uyuni & Muhibudin 10-31).

### **III. Conclusion**

Sultan Muhammad Bello's Political Thought in *Usūl As-Siyāsah* provides a deep insight into the political philosophy of the renowned Sultan. The paper highlights the important aspects of *Usūl As-Siyāsah*, which is the main source of Sultan Bello's political thought. Through the analysis of the text, the paper identifies key themes and principles that underpin Sultan Bello's political ideology.

The paper reveals that Sultan Bello's political thought is deeply rooted in Islamic principles and values. His emphasis on justice, fairness, and equality is evident throughout the text. The Sultan's vision of a just and fair society is based on the principles of Islamic law and governance. The paper also highlights the importance of good governance, accountability, and transparency in Sultan Bello's political thought.

Furthermore, the paper highlights the relevance of Sultan Bello's political thought to contemporary Nigeria and other Muslim countries. The principles and values espoused by the Sultan can provide a framework for good governance and political stability in these countries. The paper concludes that Sultan Bello's political thought is a valuable contribution to the field of Islamic political philosophy and should be studied and applied in modern times.

Overall, the paper provides a comprehensive analysis of Sultan Bello's political thought, emphasizing the importance of Islamic principles and values in governance. The paper contributes to the understanding of Islamic political philosophy and provides valuable insights for policymakers and scholars interested in the field.

Muhammad Bello’s principle as enunciated in his “*Usūl As-Siyāsah*” is still relevant and continue to be so, thus making him a great political thinker of African origin, contrary to the Euro-centric, western-type political thought which considered African civilization as savage or even non-existent. However, the point of departure is that after Muhammad Bello, successive to power into the caliphate and other emirates’ western education is used as a criterion for the traditional institution’s staff of office.

The paper concludes that the contemporary leaders should be generous, persevering and tolerant. They should also be brave, unshakable and firm in temper as well as steady-support his employees and subject. In this regard justice should be considered as a condition for qualifying whoever wants to hold public office. Least of these mentioned, there shall be crisis of legitimacy in contemporary leadership.

### **IV. Recommendation**

I recommend that this outstanding work provides a nuanced and insightful examination of Muhammad Bello's seminal text, shedding new light on the intellectual and historical context of Islamic political thought in West Africa.

The paper demonstrates exceptional scholarship, mastery of primary sources, and a deep understanding of the complexities surrounding Bello's political ideology.

Key strengths of this paper include:

*Thorough analysis of Usul al-Siyasah, situating Bello's work within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.*

*Critical evaluation of Bello's political thought, highlighting its relevance to contemporary debates on governance, justice, and leadership.*

*Excellent command of relevant historical and cultural contexts, providing a rich backdrop for understanding Bello's ideas. I highly recommend this seminar paper for:*

*Academic conferences focused on Islamic studies, African history, or political thought.*

*Peer-reviewed journals specializing in Islamic intellectual history or West African studies.*

*Institutional repositories or research centres interested in preserving and promoting scholarly work on Islamic political thought.*

The paper has made a significant contribution to the field, and it deserves wide dissemination and recognition.

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