THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARS' (ʿULAMA) TO POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN ZAMFARA STATE, NIGERIA

Dr LAWAL MUSA KAGARA
Department of Primary Education
Zamfara State College of Education, Maru
lawalmusakagara@gmail.com 07033099667

Dr ABDULLAHI HARUNA
Department of Islamic Studies
Zamfara State College of Education, Maru

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Abstract

Islamic Scholars (ʿUlama) have actively contributingin politics, administration, and governance. They serve as judges, advisers, and administrators, among other roles, and influence public opinion. This paper discusses the formal and informal roles andcontributions of Islamic Scholars ('Ulama) in the political life and governance of Zamfara State, Nigeria. It traces the legal and institutional framework that grants Islamic Scholars (ʿUlama) a statutory advisory and regulatory presence in the state's politics and governance. Notably, their involvement in politics has influenced the re-implementation of Shari'ah, leading to the creation of commissions, boards, committees, and a ministry for religious affairs, among others, which are currently being managed by Islamic Scholars ('Ulama). The aim of this write-up is to demonstrate how Islamic Scholars' contributionsin politics shapes policy, decision-making, and the lives of voters, assess their contributions to state governance, and highlight the importance of Islamic Scholars' (ʿUlama) involvement in the electoral process, particularly in their agitation forvoting for the right and credible candidates regardless of political or sectarian affiliations. The paper synthesizes existing primary sources, including state law provisions, official statements, contemporaneous reports, and peer-reviewed and policy literature, to develop an integrated analysis of Islamic Scholars' roles in Zamfara State. There is a need for fieldwork, including interviews with Islamic Scholars ('Ulama), judicial officers,

among others. The paper situates Zamfara State as a case study since it was the first Nigerian state to re-implement the Shari'ah legal system and institutionalize a strong statutory role for Islamic Scholars. Finally, the paper reveals that Islamic Scholars mobilized the electorate to vote for the right candidates and ensure Shari'ah compliance among Muslims in the state. The paper Recommends that Islamic scholars ('Ulama) should maintain neutrality, speak the truth and effectively govern the boards, commissions, and agencies entrusted them.

Introduction

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. May peace and blessings be upon our noble Prophet Muhammad (saw), his family, and those who follow his path until the day of resurrection.

The relationship between religion and politics has long been a defining feature of governance in Muslim societies. In Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara state, the efforts ofIslamicscholars *(CUlama)*to politics and governancehavebeen contributing in shaping the lives of their fellow brethren, as their influence has touched all parts of Muslim endeavours.Islamicscholars *(CUlama)*are believed to possess certain traits or influence unavailable to others; for this reason, their prayers and charms are sought by practitioners as sources of fortune, blessings, and, at times, mischief.The term has always been regarded as honourable, and reserved for those who embody the associated traits. This distinction is not simply given, but earned through dedication, integrity, piety, and a deep reverence for Allah (S.W.T).[1]

The democratic transition in 1999 marked a significant turning point in the political engagement of Islamic Scholars (C*Ulama*) in Zamfara state. The re-implementation of *shari'ah* law catalysed their active participation in politics and governance. Prior to the 1999 general election, Islamic scholars *(CUlama)* were passive in politics, let alone in the governance of the state. The non-participation of Islamic scholars *(CUlama)* is a result of the notion that either engaging in politics is un-Islamic or that politicians are not inviting them during their campaigns.

However, following the rebirth of democracy, Islamic scholars (C*Ulama*) began actively participating in politics and governance, most especially after the re-implementation of*Shari'ah* in the state. In Zamfara state, it was the Islamic Scholars who really championed the struggle for the *re*-implementationof*Shari'ah,* as maintained by Late *Sheikh*AbubakarGero Argungu.[2]

He also added that when the Governor wanted to re-implement *Shari'ah*, he would occasionally summon them to a meeting, and they would spend the whole night discussing how to implement it. Before this, AlhAhmad Sani (YarimanBakura) the first civilian Governorin one of his campaign promises,was for the re-implementation of *Shari'ah* where he said:

In any town I went to, I first start with *kafara* (sic) which is chanting *Allahu Akbar*three (3) times. Then I always said' 'I am in the race not to make money, but to improve our religious way of worship, and introduce religious reforms that will make us get Allah's favour and then we will have abundant resources for development[3]

This is the primary reason why Islamic scholars supported the movement, which

provided themwith the ample opportunities to contribute to politics and governance at that time, and they continue to do so today through the various boards, commissions, committees, agencies, and ministry for religious affairs established by the Governor.

It is against this background that the paper examines the contributions of (*CUlama*) Islamic Scholars to politics and governance in Zamfara State.

Conceptual Clarifications

Before we go into a more profound exposition of the subject matter, we need to define and clarify some of the significant terms and concepts that comprise the paper's title, to avoid being misled and ensure the discussion is fully comprehensive within its conceptual and theoretical framework.

Examination

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, contribution means

Politics

According to dictionary meaning Politicsis the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decision that affect a country or a society or matters concerned with getting or using power within a particular period group or organization[6]. Politics is also defined as who gets what, when, and how. It encompasses the structures and activities related to policy-making, power relations, leadership, and the pursuit of collective goals. From an Islamic perspective, politics involves moral and religious dimensions, in which leaders and scholars seek to align governance with *Shari'ah* principles and justice.

Governance

Governance is the action or manner of governing a state, organization, or place, the state of being governed. However, from *a Shari'ah* epistemological perspective, governance involves three essential elements: justice, consultation, and equality before the law. While justice in this vein is all-encompassing, from the social to the administrative and economic realms, the *Shari'ah* establishes the relationship between the government and the governed community[7]. It regulates the government's authority vis-à-vis the subjects' freedom. The *Shari'ah* system vests government authority not on any individual monarch and autocrat, but on the community through their representatives, and insists that consultation and consensus decisions should be maintained as the basis of good governance

Brief history of the study area

Zamfara State, located in North-Western Nigeria, was created on 1st October 1996 from the old Sokoto State, with Gusau as its capital. The state was formed during the regime of General SaniAbacha. The state has continued to grow and develop, focusing on agriculture, education, and Islamic scholarship. The state shares boundaries with Kaduna, Sokoto, and Katsina states.[8] Zamfara state occupies a distinctive place in Nigeria's political history because it pioneered the re-implementation of *Shari'ah* under Governor Ahmad Sani (YarimanBakura) in October 2000. This triggered national and international attention, prompting several other Northern states to follow suit. As a result of this development, boards, commissions, committees, and the Ministry for religious affairs, among others, were established to assist in the promotion and sustenance of *Shari'ah*, which paved the way for Islamic scholars to contribute.

Islamic scholars (*CUlama*) and their contributions to politics

Dictionary of Arabic and English defines *Alim*plural *CUlama* to mean a scientist, scholar, savant, expert, specialist, authority, adapt, master, connoisseur, and knower[9] all these are names given to *AIim*, which serves as an indication that he possesses unique qualities quite different to other ordinary man and because of the prestigious position of *CUlama* Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) in one of his ahadith, referred them as the heirs of the Prophets where he said. ''Indeed, the scholars are the heirs of the Prophets''[10]. The term was derived from the Arabic verse *Al-alim*, which means the knowledgeable, the learned, he knows, or he learns. The origin of both the singular and plural forms of the term comes from the Qur'an. *Al-CUlama* singular *Al-Alim* means the 'learned' or 'the erudite'. It is a venerable concept within the Muslim circle.[11]

The ascendency of Islamic scholars (*CUlama*) in the public sphere has been evolving over several centuries in the history of Muslim communities in present-day Nigeria. Two pivotal historical events contributed to this development: the nineteenth-century *Jihad* led by *Sheikh*UsmanDanfodiyo, which established the Sokoto caliphate (1804-1903), the caliphate founded by scholars like Sheikh UsmanbnFodiyo, AbdullahibnFodiyo, and Muhammadu Bello, exemplified a model of Islamic politics and governance rooted in justice and morality where Scholars combined intellectual pursuits with political leadership.

Secondly, the twentieth-century British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate, Borno, and their neighbours is particularly relevant for understanding the role of Islamic scholars in society, even without their participation in politics and governance of the state. In northern Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara State, politics and governance are deeply intertwined with Islam, serving as a framework for governance, law, and moral enhancement. [12]In the contemporary political context, their influence extends beyond the pulpit into policy-making, political mobilization, special advisers, commissioners, Permanent commissioners, among others.

What are the rationales and justifications for the involvement of Islamic Scholars (*Ulama*) in the political processes?

Zamfara State, being the first in Nigeria to re-implement *Shari'ah* in 2000, offers a unique and critical case for analysing the rationales for the involvement of Islamic scholars (*CUlama*) in politics. It is common knowledge that, prior to this time, Islamic scholars perceived politics as a game, not the business of men of God (sic); as such, the *CUlama* used to stay away from it.[13]

However, following the restoration of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, Islamic scholars began actively participating in politics and governance. This must have something to do with the fact that they are not the same as pre-colonial or traditional Islamic scholars (*CUlama*). They are the type that are influenced by Western education. This system of education included its form, curriculum, methodology, and evaluation procedures. The curriculum was designed so that it became the only avenue for advancement into social strata.[14] The Islamic education borrowed a leaf from the Western system of education. It moved away from the traditional method of oral recitation to other methods, such as individual, experimental, problem-solving, and assignment methods, and to the integration of curriculum within some curricular subjects, such as English, Mathematics, and History. In addition, there is the provision of job opportunities for Islamic

studies teachers, who now receive salaries instead of relying on charity from parents or other relatives.[15]

As a result of these changes/influences introduced by Western education and British colonial authorities, the modern Islamic scholars (*CUlama*) emerged, who saw politics and religion as inseparable. In contrast to the traditional Islamic scholars educated in traditional Qur'anic schools, modern Islamic scholars (*CUlama*) are educated in newly established Arabic and Islamic schools, higher Islamic schools, the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies under the Faculties of Islamic Studies, and language schools in Colleges and Universities.[16]

Consequent upon their acquired expertise in the aforementioned schools, colleges, and universities Islamic scholars(*CUlama*) resident in the state are gainfully engaged as special advisers, commissioners, board members, and in other pertinent roles, thereby contributing significantly to the advancement of politics, governance, and societal well-being of the people in the state.

The re-implementation of *Shari'ah* in Zamfara State is not the handiwork of pre-colonial Islamic scholars; instead, it was championed by modern Islamic scholars, Moreover, they are the type that, in all the general elections conducted in the state, have supported, and some of them openly campaigned for one of the politicians,in Islamic gatherings, a particular party is supported by the majority of Islamic Scholars (*CUlama*). This is due to their firm belief that, under the leadership, *Shari'ah* would be enforced and strengthened. From the beginning of the Fourth Republic to date, Islamic Scholars have become deeply involved in running the governmental affairs.[17]All the agencies, commissions, Boards, committees, and the Ministry for Religious Affairs are being placed under the leadership of an influential and respected Islamic scholar. The involvement of Islamic scholars (*CUlama*) in Zamfara State politics can be understood across three (3) phases, namely:

1. The foundational phase (1999-2007), during Alh Ahmad Sani (YarimanBakura) tenure, Islamic Scholars were central to the declaration and enforcement of *Shari'ah*. They advised the Governor on the Islamic legal framework, influenced appointments, and shaped moral policy. This phase marked the zenith of religious authorities in governance.[18]

2. The consolidation phase (2007-2019) under MahmudaAliyuShinkafi and AbdulazizAbubakarYari. The Islamic Scholars' role became institutionalized but increasingly politicized. Some scholars aligned with the ruling party, while others criticized corruption and moral decline.[19]

3. In the contemporary phase (2019- to date), under Bello Matawalle and DaudaLawal, the current engagements focus on peacebuilding and social reform. Islamic scholars (*Ulama*) continue to preach, serve as moral advocates, and hold leadership positions across all agencies, boards, and commissions aligned with the re-implementation of *Shari'ah.*[20]

Governance in Islam

In Islamic governance (*Al-hukm* or *Siyasahal-Shariyah*), is viewed as a trust (*Amanah*) and a responsibility (*Masuliyyah*), meant to ensure justice, welfare, and accountability in society, as emphasized in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.[21]

Foundation of Governance in Islam

Islamic governance is based on the belief that sovereignty belongs to Allah (SWT) as maintained in the following verse of the Qur'an:" No authority, the command is for none but Allah (SWT).[22]

Leaders are therefore vicegerents (*Khulafa'a*) of Allah (SWT) entrusted to rule according to his guidance and for the benefit of the Muslim.

Principles of Good Governance in Islam

The Principles below must be observed before any government is considered as an Islamic government, and they are:

1. Justice (*Adl*) is central to all Islamic governance; leadership must be based on trust, fair and impartial in all decisions to his end Allah (SWT) says "Allah command you to render back your trust, to those to whom they are due: and your judge between man and man, that judge with justice[23].
2. In the Constitution (*Shari'ah*), an ideal Islamic governance must be based on a constitution drafted by experts, scholars, and other relevant citizens.

Allah says: "Those who hearken to their lord … and establish regular prayers, who (conduct) their affairs by mutual constitution (*Shari'ah*) --[24]

The above-quoted verse indicates that mutual consultation is necessary in any governance, including state affairs, between rulers and ruled, or between different departments of Administration, to maintain the unity of Administration.

3. Accountability (*Masuliyyah*) leaders are accountable for their deeds, meaning they will be called upon to account for what they did during their tenure; as such, it is expected of them to discharge their duties according to the rule of law.

The contribution of Islamic Scholars (*cUlama*) in the Administration of the state

There is no doubt that Islamic scholars have been contributing to the management of state affairs, as evidenced by the existence of numerous commissions, boards, communities, and Ministry for religious affairs. They are the*Hisbah* Commission, established under Law No. 17 of 2003[25]. Among its functions are: eradicating social vices by all possible means, and ensuring that the socio-political and economic lives of the people in the state are in line with the *Shari'ah*. Zamfara state Anti-corruption commission under law No 12 of 2003 was formed under provision, of section 15 (5) of the 1999 constitution which gives power to the state to abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power.[26]*Zakat*Collection, Distribution, and Endowment board under law No 130 of 2000,[27]*Shari'ah* research and development commission under law No 18 of 2003,[28] Public Complaint Commission was established under law No 19 0f 2003, [29] Ministry for Religious Affairs, Moon sighting committee, Prayer timing committee,*Ulama*consultative council law No 6 of 2003 and assigned explicit functions such as screening and recommending candidates for *Shari'ah*court appointment, issuing *fatwas*

[30]among others, prominent Islamic scholars in the state havebeing appointed to overseethem.

Table 1: List of some Islamic Scholars ([C]*Ulama*)in the state who have being appointed to oversee the activities of the Commissions, Boards, Ministry for Religious Affairs,among others.

S/N	Name of Islamic Scholar	Sectarian Affiliation	Board,Commission, Ministry for Religious Affairs
1.	*Sheikh*TukurSaniJangebe	*AhlSunnah*	MinistryforReligiousAffairs2019-2023
2.	*Sheikh*AbubakarSodangi	*AhlSunnah*	*Zakat*, Collection, Distribution, and endowment Board 2021-2023, *Shari'ah*Research
3.	Dr AtikuBalarabeZawiyyah	*Tijjaniyah*	Public Complaint Commission 2003 to 2007 *Hisbah* commission 1999 to 2003 Anti-corruption commission 2011 to 2015, Vice Chairman *Ulama*consultative council 2023 to Date
4.	Mal kabiru Umar Maru	*AhlSunnah*/*Salafiyyah*	*Shari'ah* Research Commission,2019 to 2023 Public Complaint Commission
5.	*Sheikh* Ahmad Umar kanoma	*AhlSunnah*	Chairman *Ulama* consultative council, *Zakat* Collection, Distribution and Endowment Board 2023 to date
6.	Liman Dan Alhaji	*Ahlsunnah*	*Zakat* Collection, Distribution and Endowment Board. 2012 to 2019
7.	Mal Umar Hassan		*Hisbah* Commission 2023 to date
8.	Mal AminuAliyu	J.T.I	*Hisbah* Commission 2007to 2011 *Shari'ah* Research Commission
9.	Dr Muhammad Haruna	*AhlSunnah*	Anti- Corruption Commission, *Jumu'at* Mosques, Eid praying and, Preaching commission 2019 to 2023, *Shari'ah* Research
10	Mal BashiruSurajo	*AhlSunnah*	*Shari'ah* research, *Zakat*, Collection, Distribution, and Endowment board,

Source: field work 2025

Conclusion

The paper revealed the significant contribution of Islamic scholars ([C]*Ulama*) to politics and governance in the state. They are serving as moral educators, promoting ethical standards among politicians and community leaders through sermons (*khutbah*), public lectures, and religious education programmes. They emphasize voting for the proper and

credible candidate, irrespective of his party affiliation, to promote honesty, accountability, modesty, and justice among political officeholders. This moral advocacy has been strengthening the ethical dimension of governance and politics in the state. Political officers are further being reminded that leadership is a trust (*Amanah*) and that they will be accountable. This is in line with the tradition of the Prophet (saw) that says'' Every one of you is a shepherd and he will be asked about his flock. The ruler is a shepherd and he will be asked about those under his care----''[31]

The paper also discovered that Islamic scholars ([C]*Ulama*) in the state have been contributing to the administration of the state, since the committees, commissions, boards, among others, that were established to ensure *Shari'ah* compliance are being headed by the Islamic scholars (*Ulama*)

Recommendations

1. Promote transparency and accountability: Islamic scholars ([C]*Ulama*) should encourage transparency and accountability in governance, ensuring that public officials are held to high standards, and that those appointed to head a particular board lead by example.
2. They should continue with their duty and advise the government on *Shari'ah* compliance, ensuring that laws and policies are in line with Islamic principles.
3. Islamic scholars ([C]*Ulama*) in the state should collaborate with the government to promote peace, stability, and development in the state.
4. The government of Zamfara should provide patronage, support, and encouragement to the [C]*Ulama* Consultative council, thereby enabling them to carry out their duties in a manner consonant with their designated roles as established in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*

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14. N/A, National Teachers Institute, Nigeria Certificate in Education, cycle 3, p.35

15. N/A, National Teachers Institute, Nigeria Certificate in Education, cycle 3, p.36

16. N/A, National Teachers Institute, Nigeria Certificate in Education, cycle 3, p.37

17. It is a verifiable fact that some of these Islamic scholars (*Ulama*) have on occasion, openly canvassed support for specific candidates either during their preaching, sermons (*khutbah*) or at Islamic gathering, notwithstanding the candidates' political affiliations, in the expectation that such candidates would provide succor to Islam and facilitate the re-implementation of *Shari'ah*.

18. Lawal. M, ''*Shari'ah* and Corruption: A Case study of Zamfara state,'' M.A Dissertation, p.87

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21. See Ahmad IbnAbd al-Halim.IbnTamiyyah,*kitabu*al *Siyyasah* al *Shariyah*, NP, 2007.

22. Qur'an 12: 40

23. Qur'an 4: 58

24. Qur'an 42:38

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