



## 10. IGWEBUIKECRACY

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Democracy is from two Greek words: *demos*, which means ‘people’ and *kratein*, which means to ‘rule’. Put together, it means the power of the people. Thus, Lincoln (cited by Kanu 2019) describes democracy as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people under the rule of law” (p. 316). Gyekye (1997) and Busia (1975) observe that the concept “the people” points to the power of the people to choose who to rule them in accordance with the general good of the society, and that they set up, by themselves, the constitutional rules, principles and procedures of governance. Carter (1978), adds that democracy as a system that is altered by time and experience, always changing, infinite in its variety, sometimes it is turbulent, however, still valuable.

As a political structure, democracy emphasizes the sharing of power among people of various categories. Sabine (1973) avers that democracy must involve mutual concession and compromise as a way of arriving at decisions. Chidili (2012) notices that three salient points from the definitions of democracy: that democratic government is not monotypic but diverse in nature; even in its diversity, it is changing; it is strictly based on the rule of law. This openness to change provides for democracy to be an adaptable system of governance that can exist anywhere in the world, including Africa.

### *i. Africanness of Democracy*

When African traditional political systems are discussed, they are often described as monarchical or aristocratic. This is a perspective that is evident in Arogbofa (2007), who argues that the traditional political systems in Africa had no place for democracy. European and African political thinkers see democracy as a system of government that began in Greece and was imported from Europe to Africa. Contrary to this opinion, the researcher argues that democracy is a cherished African value, which existed in pre-colonial Africa. Thus, Africa cannot be understood as a passive recipient of democracy. Before the advent of the West to Africa, African nationals already practiced Igwebuikecracy, an indigenous democratic government designed by the people for the people.

In Igwebuikecracy, the community determines the praxis of the socio-political life of the people while putting into consideration existential particularities and peculiarities. Herein, followership is as important as leadership since leadership is not a one man show.

Members are fully involved in decision making and implementation of such decisions on issues that affect them. Igwebuikocracy takes into account African values and identity, thus, building on the African peculiar experience- history, circumstances, and situations.

## ii. *The Igbo Igwebuikocratic Structure*

Communal living among the Igbo led to the emergence of economic, social and political institutions. From this emerged leaders, and as social groups developed, effective administrative systems emerged as well to regulate social relations. This was founded on egalitarian and democratic structures. The political organization was constituted by different levels of autonomous democratic governments which exercised political, social and economic control over the lives of the people.

- a. ***The Nuclear Family***: It was the bedrock of social and political organization, referred to as *ezi na uno*. It consisted of a man, his wives, his married and unmarried sons, unmarried daughters and the servants or slaves, if any. The Father was the leader of the household and was in possession of the family *ofo*, which is the symbol of authority, justice, law and uprightness (Kanu 2015). The father was responsible for directing the affairs of the family, however, it was done in consultation with his senior sons and wives.



Figure 5: Nuclear Family

b. **The Patrilineage or Extended Family:** It is called *Umunna*. It is composed of a number of families that have a common eponymous father. Uchendu (1965) defines the *Ununna* as “a territorial kin-based unit which subdivides into compounds (*ezi obi*)” (p. 40). The head of this political unit is the oldest male member of the extended family also known as the *di-okpara* and has the *ofo* of the extended family in his possession. According to Olisa (2002) and Nwosu (2002), the *di-okpara* presides over meetings, sacrifices, issues of inheritance, settlement of disputes among members of the extended family, marriage, allocation of lands and the representation of the family with other extended families. In decision making, the *di-okpara* worked in consultation with the other heads of the extended family who constituted the extended family assembly. Decisions were arrived at through dialogue, consensus (*nkwekolita*), compromise, cooperation and consultation (*Igba Izu*).

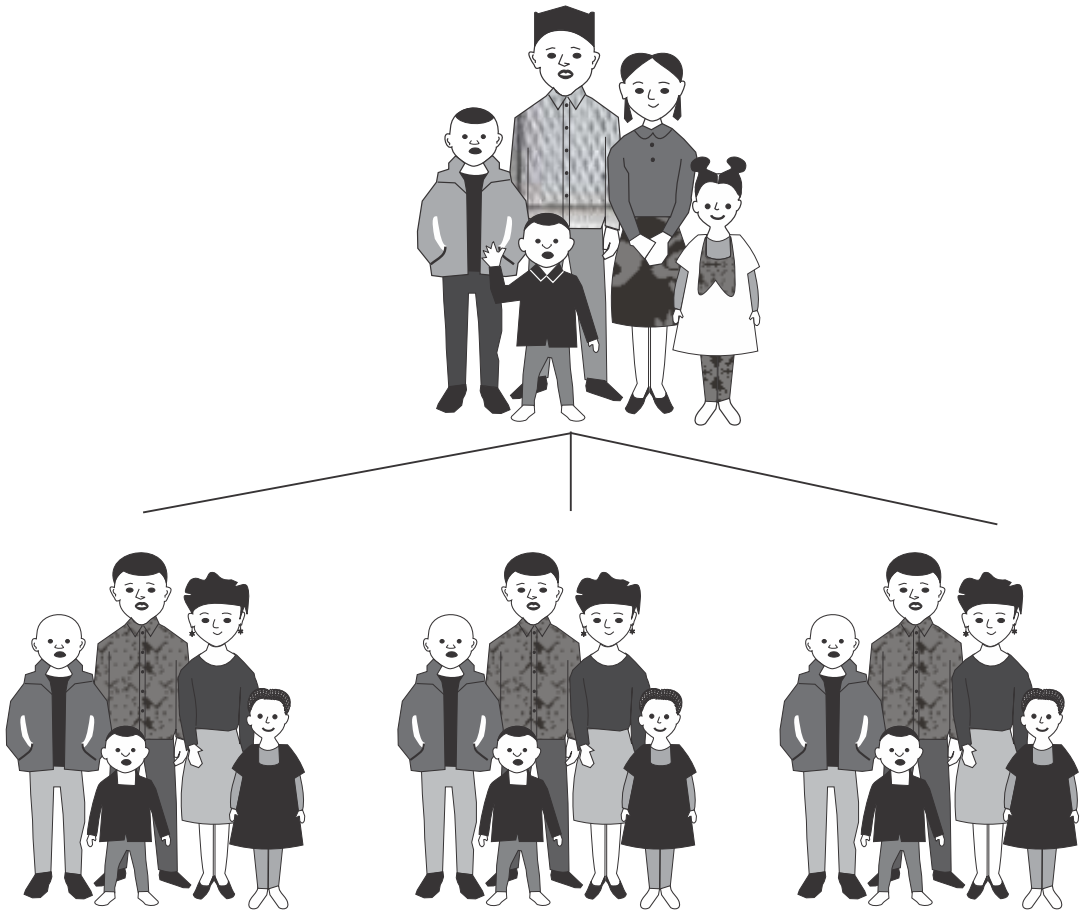


Figure 6: Extended Family

- c. **The Maximal Lineage:** It is also referred to as *Idumu* in Igbo, which means quarter. It is made up of a number of extended families who are linked by a common putative ancestor. This major lineage is headed by the oldest male among them. He holds the *ofo* of the major lineage and presides at functions concerning the major lineage and was considered as a sacred person with taboos and rituals accompanying the violation of his authority. In his exercise of authority over the major lineage, he worked in consultation with a large assembly comprising of senior household men, titled men, priests, men of honour, intelligence and wealth, etc.

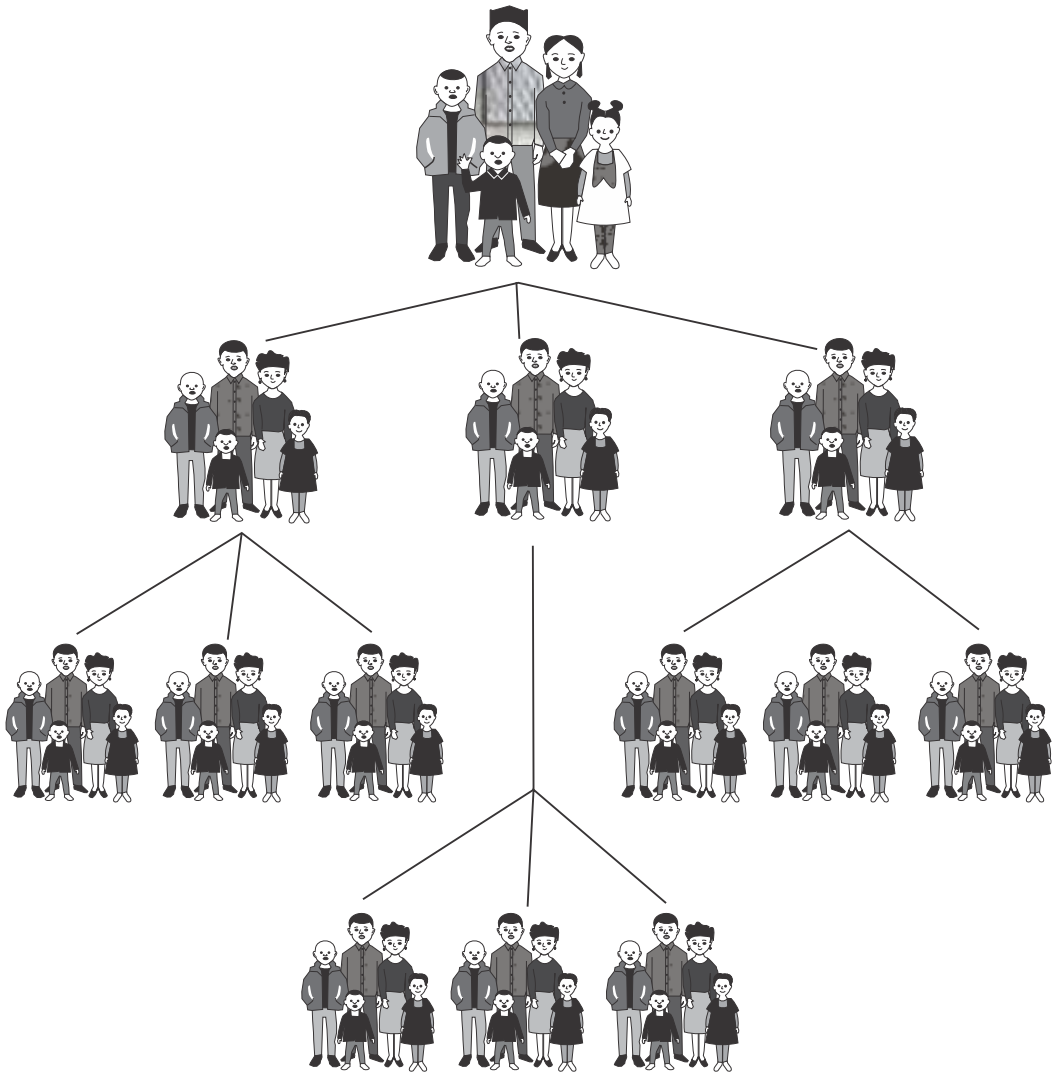


Figure 7: Maximal Lineage

C. **The Village-Group Assembly:** It was the biggest socio-political group referred to as ogbe (village). Ajaegbo (2014) observes that it was composed of a number of major lineages who are descended from a common ancestor or different putative ancestors. Onwuejeogwu (1972) refers to the ogbe as federation of autonomous settlements, and by Nzimiro (1972) as wards. The assembly was the highest authority with its members being senior males of households, professional hunters, priests, honourable and wealthy men, warriors, titled men, medicine men, etc. The leader of this assembly varied from one village to another, in some, it was headed by the council of elders: a group of wise, knowledgeable, courageous and transparent men. Maquet (1972) refers to their authority as “a collegial authority exercised by the chiefs of the various lineages living in the village” (p. 57). The Owerri Igbo call it Oha, and its members-ndi Oha. In some, the oldest member of the council of elders referred to as the diokpa, and in this case, he becomes the custodian of the ofo. The supreme head of the assembly took decisions in consultation with the constituent members of the village assembly. Consultation, consensus and compromise were necessary elements in resolving issues and decision making. The village square (ama nzuko ora), usually a common place, was the arena of assembly



Plate 3: The Village-Group Assembly