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WHICH WAY AFRICA: MULTIPARTY OR ONE PARTY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT? A MOVE TO FASHION A DEMOCRACY THAT IS TRULY AFRICAN

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Abstract

Africa is on pressure to democratize. A major part of it, is already practicing democracy. Other parts are considering a switch to democracy. But the big question has remained unanswered. Which sort of democracy is best fitted for Africa? Should it be one party system or multi-party system? Opinions of scholars are divided on this.

This work using the philosophical methods of hermeneutics, criticisms and analysis shows the merits and demerits of each of these systems of government and concludes that none of them fits well the present socio-political and economic environment of Africa.

In the light of this, it recommends the no-party system of government as a veritable alternative to one party and multiparty systems. The no-party system overcomes the weaknesses of both the multiparty and one party systems and thus has a greater potential to lead Africa to its greatest quest - development. It holds the promise of making Africa independent not just in name but also in actuality.

Keywords: country, regime, conspiracy, population.

I. INTRODUCTION

The debate as to the best form of government for Africa, started as far back as the nationalistic period – during the struggle for independence and the early days of independence of most African countries. It appears today, that those in support of multiparty system are winning the debate as virtually all democratic African countries chose it. Even those countries like Tanzania and Guinea that started with one party system have reverted to multiparty system. Unfortunately, this choice of multiparty system of government has not translated to socio-political development in Africa.

Instead Africa has become the den of political instability, home of electoral racketing, fraud, rigging, killings, maiming and hijacking. It has become a land where democracy exist merely in name and autocracy exists in actuality. The multiparty system seems to have deepened and institutionalized bribery and all forms of corruption in the continent. These signs show that multiparty system has actually not fared well in Africa.

One party system has not been given an equal opportunity like multiparty system to show what it is capable of. But the few countries like Tanzania, that practiced it for many years, have little or nothing to show as its merit. Tanzania reverted to multiparty system, showcasing the failure of one party system. One great disadvantage of one party system, is its inherent tendency to translate to autocracy, due to absence of external oppositions.

Due to the weaknesses of the two favoured systems of government, this work makes a move for a no-party system of government. This may not be popular in the West, but never the less will fit well to the historical, economic, social and political lives of Africa. A move for no-party system is therefore a move in the right direction. It is a move to fashion a democracy that is indeed African.

This work rests on the fact that there is no prototype democracy that all must struggle to conform to. Africa needs not transport hook, line and sinker the democracy practiced in the west; for her history, polity, and financial standing is dissimilar with that of the West. She must make effort to contrive a democracy that best suits her environment. In this work I offer for Africa, a brand of democracy that is unique and will fit well with her.

This work starts by showing the merits and demerits of one party and multiparty system of government, with the aim of making it bare, why they do not fit well in Africa. This sets the ground for the argument for a no-party system of government.

II. MERITS AND DEMERITS OF MULTIPARTY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

Multiparty system which is a system that accommodates many political parties, who all stand a chance of winning in elections, has a sterling advantage of having opposition parties, that act like checks and balance to the ruling party. This will prevent the ruling party from becoming authoritarian and tyrannical. This is a good and positive point about multiparty system, but only remains positive, if the opposition are strong enough to influence decisions of the ruling party. In cases, where the ruling party has a great numeric and political strength, (like it was with the PDP of Nigeria, at its prime), the voices of the opposition will become too still to be heard. The numeric strength of PDP in its reigning days, was far greater than that of the opposition parties put together, meaning that it wielded supreme power and was therefore near unstoppable.

It is right to say therefore, that having opposition parties is only an advantage, if the oppositions are strong enough. In the case of Africa, oppositions are rarely strong enough to influence the activities of the ruling party. This is worsened by the fact that most prominent and influential people are quick to move to any party that assumes the mantle of leadership. It seems to me that the idea of opposition is still very strange to Africans. Kaunda believes so too. According to him, the "idea of an institutional opposition is foreign to the African tradition" because "in our original societies we operated by consensus" (Kaunda 1966:476). Nkrumah also vehemently supports: "in traditional African society, no sectional interest could be regarded as supreme, nor did legislative and executive power aid the interests of any particular group. The welfare of the people was supreme" (1970:68). Opposition is a strange thing in Africa and still influences the political life of the people till date - almost nobody wants to oppose. Rather all wants to be in the ruling party. In Nigeria, when PDP ruled almost everybody shifts to PDP, when APC took over the reins, almost all important people from PDP moved to APC. Those who remain in opposition parties are most times there, not because they want to oppose, but perhaps because they benefit from the federal allocation to the party. This shows that Africans are not capable of forming opposition parties. This is perhaps because "in Africa the things which divide contending groups tend to be of such fundamental significance that continuity of government could hardly be achieved through a change in the party in power" (Kaunda 1966:476).

This implies that African society does not need any institutionalized opposition parties. This is precisely because her “fundamental preference for consensus necessitates a model in which all are represented and membership is not denied to anyone. Such a system will be closer to the spirit and historical experience of Africans than one in which division is taken as a datum and persons are generally expected to line up behind one party or another” (Taiwo 2004:252). But if Africans are not good at opposition, why then do we practice multiparty system, in spite of its high cost?

Supporters of multiparty system will argue that aside from accommodating opposition parties, multiparty system also engenders a sense of caution in the ruling party. The argument is that, a ruling party knowing that, if it does not perform well, will lose power to the opposition party during elections, will strive to perform better at governance. No one will actually want to vote a poorly performing political party back to power, but in Africa where elections are mostly won not on merit or credibility of the candidates or parties, it becomes clear that this advantage of multiparty system is nothing but a pseudo-advantage – it only appears to but does not exist. In Nigeria, for instance, it is an open secret that the PDP government perpetrated itself in power, through rigging and other electoral irregularities. It was not its political performance that maintained it in power for over 15 years but its might. Since most political parties, especially in Nigeria do not depend on the votes of the masses, the argument that multiparty system provides a sense of caution to the ruling party is null and void. One argument that may be put forth in favour of multiparty system of government is that it could engender a greater political participation and increase political enlightenment of the people.

By the intense campaigning and manifestoes, political parties could be said to be capable of making a greater number of people to get involved in politics and governance. Political participation is a great booster of democracy. Through the campaigns and politicking of the various parties, many people will be reached and brought into active political participation. By their campaigning efforts they also enlighten the citizenry politically – this is also a great booster of democracy. Thus, if multiparty system could improve political education and participation, it means it is a great enhancer of democracy. This is actually true in ideal situations, but in Africa where political parties spend more time in planning how to manipulate and rig election than in campaigning, it is not true. In Nigeria, it is an open secret that most people who win elections are those who campaign the least. All one needs is to belong to the right party and make money ready, for buying of votes and for other corrupt practices. Candidates do not win in Nigeria by campaigning, educating and selling themselves to the public, they win by fraudulently manipulating the ignorance and weaknesses of the people. Multiparty system of government seems to be floating in the African environment. The African environment evidently abhors multiparty system.

Aside from it being not in congruence with the socio-political lives of Africans, multiparty system also does not fit well with the economic environment of Africa. African countries are relatively poor and thus cannot fully support multiparty system. Multiparty system, since it depends largely on the government for sponsorship is expensive and drains the countries economically. The money invested in political parties could be used to better the lives of the masses. For being very expensive, it should not be a system for Africa.

Aside from its huge cost, multiparty system also breeds disunity. It is known that politics pitch fathers against sons, friends against friends, communities against communities, party against parties. Many lives have been lost in the process. Multiparty system is a threat to the fragile unity of African countries. Most of these African countries were forcefully glued together, making them unable to successfully blend. Multiparty system put much more weight on this frail unity and may one day tear it. Multiparty system is therefore, not the best form of government for African countries.

Multiparty system depersonalizes the political officials, who tend to pay more loyalty to their parties than to the people. It is the party who ensured that they won the elections, they stick more to the demands of the party than the masses. Wamala agrees with this. He writes: “with the rise of the party system, the party replaces the ‘people’. Thus the candidates proposed by a party no longer appear as individual men and women of flesh and blood. What you have are party members resplendent with party cards.

With the massive help of the party machine, party members will try to win the people's votes by appealing to their basest instincts and sentiments... finally, those who are elected are representatives, not really of the people but of the party, which has become a power in itself... their loyalty is to the party" (Wamala 2004: 440). Emphasis is more on the party than individuals in a multiparty system. A vote is cast for the party and not for an individual contesting the election. Parties in a multiparty system therefore overshadows individuals.

Another demerit of multiparty system is that it could lead to personal rule. Since only few people control a party at the top. Wamala in this regards writes: "as only a few members at the top wield power, even the parties that command the majority and therefore form the government are really ruled by a handful of persons at the top of the party.

The powerful party bosses, as a matter of fact, personalize power, and whoever wants favors will try to come under their wings. Thus, personal rule, after seeming to be eliminated, makes a return to the political arena of the modern state" (Wamala 2004: 441). Multiparty system therefore, could easily degenerate to personal rule - few people could actually decide for and rule the nation.

III. MERIT AND DEMERITS OF ONE PARTY SYSTEM

One party system is often said to foster unity. This is the kind of system advocated by notable African scholars like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Sekou Toure, Kenneth Kaunda etc. It is their belief that this system will foster the communal spirit of Africa, where unity and harmony are enthroned. Multiparty systems divide and disunite, while one party keep the people one and from this oneness, officers are elected to represent the people. Nkrumah argues in connection to this that "a people's parliamentary democracy with a one-party system is better able to express and satisfy the common aspirations of a nation as a whole, than a multiple-party parliamentary system, which is in fact only a ruse for perpetuating, and covers up, the inherent struggle between the 'haves' and the have-nots'. (1969:100-1). Nyerere concludes: "I am now going to suggest: that, where there is one party, and that party is identified with the nation as a whole, the foundations of democracy are firmer than they can ever be where you have two or more parties, each representing only a section of the community" (1987:478). One party system encourages unity and harmony and works against divisiveness and crisis.

Though, crisis will still exist in one party system, this crisis will not be as destructive as that of multiparty system. A fight between members of one house may not be as destructive as a fight between members of two houses. This is perhaps why adherents to this argument, believe that to foster communalism, a country ought to imbibe one party system.

One party system is cheaper to run than a multiparty system. The money needed to fund many parties could be used to fund many developmental projects. In one party system, it is only one party that needs funding and thus is less expensive. One party system will therefore, foster more, Africa's development than multiparty system.

One party system sustains communalism, which a traditional value of Africa. It is acclaimed to be a distinctive mark of Africa – that which gives Africa its identity. To destroy it is to destroy African identity. This is perhaps why most nationalist favoured one party system of government - it is a system that best fits communalist states. The multi-party system by nature puts a divide amongst people. It puts a sword in families, kin and kith, and amongst friends. Multi-party system put fires in communities, whereby members of communities fight amongst themselves – it breeds division. This fire churned out by this party system kills communalism, and paves way for individualism to emerge. The presently dying communalism, has been a function of the impact of multi-party system. The more and stronger the parties, the more the division it will breed, and the more Africa will draw nearer individualism and farther from communalism. Though, one party system favours communalism, I do not however, think that communalism is what Africa needs now.

Communalism as I argued in my paper titled "Between Communalism and Individualism: Which way Africa?" is a drawback to Africa's development.

Communalism stifles creativity, promotes laziness, demotivates and promotes tribalism, favoritism, and nepotism. All these are enemies of development and this is a key reason why Africa is struggling to develop. On the basis of this, I reject one party system of government as a system for Africa. Africa needs a system that will move it far from communalism – a system that will emancipate individuals and imbue them with the spirit to adventure, explore and exploit their environment. It is only then that Africa will begin to know development. Communalism may have been a mark of Africa, but this is not a legitimate reason to adhere to it. We do not need to hold onto values for historical reasons but for their practical usefulness. As far as I am concern, communalism does not promote development. If it does, then the colonizers would have met Africa more developed than them or at best at equal level of development. The fact that, at the point of colonization, Africa was far backward than their Western and American counterparts, is a clear pointer that communalism did not serve African developmental quest well.

One party system for promoting communalism need to be avoided like a plague. One party system has one further weakness. It has the tendency to become an instrument of one-man rule. OlufemiTaiwo emphasized this thus: needless to say, the danger of this type of party becoming the instrument of one-man rule and a threat to heterodoxy and individual freedom cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, the PartiDemocratique du Guine did become such a party and it wreaked murderous havoc on ordinary Guineans and intellectuals alike” (2004:250). This sort of party is prone to excesses. It could also become autocratic, as the few on top of the ladder could lot it over others and perpetuate themselves in leadership. The risk of it becoming tyrannical is greater than in multiparty system, with opposition parties providing checks and balance.

IV. IN PRAISE OF NO PARTY SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

The no party system of government operates with little or no cost on the government. Considering the economic standing of Africa today, it is unwise to institute an expensive form of government, for it will only draw Africa backward. Africa is poor and needs a kind of democracy that is not expensive to run. The no party system of government is the cheapest form of government and that is what Africa should go for.

The no party system of my vision, is one without political parties. One where there is no electoral contest as such. It will follow the process followed in the selection of vice chancellors in universities. In universities vice chancellor position is open to staff of the university or other universities of a certain rank. The interested candidates will be voted into office by the members of the senate. The same is true of other principal officers like the registrar and the bursar.

I believe this process would fare well if transported to the national political system. Candidates for presidency should come from the highest ranking officials of federal staff and the highest ranking staff should be responsible for voting him/her into office. Candidates for governorship should come from the highest ranking officials of the state staff and similarly the highest ranking officials should vote him/her into office. The same is applicable to the local government chairman, he/she should come from the highest ranking staff of the local government and should be voted into office by members of his rank. Those who have distinguished themselves at these level of service could be qualified to contest for the highest position available to that level.

Positions in the Senate and House of Representatives need not be contested for. Membership of these should be by employment. Vacancies should be advertised and qualified candidates employed to fill the seats. Their salaries should be paid like other staff in the country. The president and leaders of the senate and House of Representatives could also come through selection based on the ranks of the senators and House of Representative members. The no party system will minimize the violence that follows elections. The university vice chancellors, registrars and bursars election, to my observation have been the most peaceful and smooth. National, state and local government elections could also be made to be violent free and safe if made to follow the format adopted in the universities. This system is followed (though not exactly the same) for the election of Popes and has been very successful. Popes emerge only from the highest ranking priests of the church – the cardinals. Government functionaries should be made to come from the highest ranking officials of different level of government.

Doing this will ensure that one with the highest level of experience will emerge as a president, governor, or chairman as the case may be. The issue of coming from nowhere into government, to begin to learn governing afresh, is not good for Africa. One who by virtue of working for long in government, would be better equipped to function well as president, governor or chairman. He/she will know better why government fail or succeed. This experience will move the country, state or local government forward. There is therefore, no gainsaying the fact that we need the most experienced people to run the government. And the most experienced could be got from the top ranking officials of each tiers of government.

The no party system also have the advantage of minimizing tribalism, ethnocentrism, factionalism, nepotism and godfatherism. This is so, because in this system, elections are not open for everybody and voting is not open for everybody. No matter how one wants his candidate to win an election, he/she can do little for the candidate, if the candidate is not among the top ranking officials as to make him/her eligible to contest. Even if he/she is within the range, the person who wish to promote him/her may not even be in the category of those qualified to vote. Even if he is, he may not wield enough influence, for those at the highest level and are qualified to vote will be from diverse cultures and tribes. It will be difficult to maneuver them all. In order words, election in this process will be relatively credible, free and transparent.

I know many will criticize this system, for failing to accommodate everybody. For failing to be open to everybody and thus not democratic. It may not be open to everybody, but this does not stop it from being democratic. If the process of selection of vice chancellors and Popes could be termed democratic, then the system I propose is also democratic. There are different forms of democracy. We need not follow hook, line and sinker the one transported from the West. Africa must contrive its own – the one that best fits it. This system is in line with Africa’s traditional political system. The selection of chiefs and leaders was not open to everybody. Only a certain class of people meet to select a king or a chief. Thus, the no party system as I propose is not foreign to Africa and thus will fit well into Africa political environment.

V. CONCLUSION

By my own ranking, the no party system of government is best for Africa. The multiparty system is the second best and the one party system is the worst form, as it will slow Africa’s growth and development.

The advantages of no party system are clear. I therefore urge Africa to consider implementing it. It will not just make Africa less corrupt and violent, it will promote and enhance development from all spheres. Above all it will provide Africa with a unique identity. Africa does not need to continually walk in the shadow of the West, it could fashion out its own path and tread it.

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