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Nweke Clement

CHAPTER SIX

MODERN SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT

Introduction

Every human society is regulated by a formal or informal set of rules and principles in relationship with one another whether as a group or individuals as well as relationship with and in the government of the society. This creates three layers of interactions in the society, namely: individual(s) to individual(s), individual(s) to government and among the people in government.

A system of government becomes imperative for a coordinated and complementary effort guided by a set of rules geared towards efficient and effective functioning of the society. A system of government presupposes the interconnected and complementary principles governing the organisation and operation of the society and its government (Igwe, 2005, p.435). Simply put, it is the set of rules and how they are operated which reflects the dynamics of interaction in the society. The set of rules are predominantly for effective structural and functional political and economic systems in the state. For instance, in a socialist society, the sale of labour (employment of a person to work for an individual employer and earn income) is prohibited because the government owns and controls all means of production and distribution of goods and services.

The nature of a system of government implies its qualities/characteristics. Basically, it has five layers, namely:

- i. Nature/form: Whether it is federalism, confederacies or unitary
- ii. Locus of executive power: Whether it is parliamentary/cabinet, presidential, or bicephalous
- iii. Embodiment of sovereignty: Whether it is monarchy, parliament, or the people
- iv. Socio-economic ideology: Whether it is feudalism, capitalism, socialism, or mixed economy
- v. Method of power distribution: Whether it is democratic, dictatorial, or tyrannical

Modern Systems of Government

There are many systems of government in practice; however, the modern systems of government include the following:

1. Presidential system of government
2. Parliamentary system of government
3. Federal system of government
4. Unitary system of government

Meaning of Presidential System of Government

Presidential system of government is a constitutional practice whereby the head of government who is also the head of state (in a unicephalous executive) is designated as the president, elected for a specified tenure and answerable to the

electorate. Simply put, it is a system of government whereby the head of state is also the head of government of a state. The idea of a unicephalous executive implies that the executive powers lies with a popularly elected president and head of state irrespective of the majority party in the legislature. In this case, the executive members are only members of the executive arm of government and do not belong both to the executive and the legislature as obtains in a parliamentary system of government (Igwe, 2005, p.348).

Features of Presidential System of Government

Some of the features of the presidential system of government include the following:

1. The president is directly elected and is accountable to the electorate for each term of office, except for case(s) of impeachment proceedings by the legislature.
2. The president may be impeached by the legislature for impeachable offence(s)/abuse of office.
3. The president is both the head of state and head of government.
4. The tenure of office is statutorily fixed.
5. There is a clear separation of powers among the three arms of government.
6. Ministers are individually responsible to the president.
7. Members of the executive may come from different parties and/or technocrats especially in cases of government of national unity.
8. The constitution is supreme in all matters above the legislature.

Modern Trends in Presidential System of Government

Presidential democracies the world over continue to evolve for better practices and have their origin traceable to the United States of America. The new wave of the presidential system of government includes the introduction of democracies in non-existing democracies like Afghanistan and Iran as well as the re-introduction of presidential democracies in states that have witnessed authoritarian or military rule such as Nigeria in 1999, etc. (Carey, 2010). Other developments for the past twenty years include enhancement of the fundamental human rights especially freedom of expression, freedom of association and active citizenship participation in the electoral processes. Notable among these are improved participation of women in politics due to political and economic liberalization as well as tendencies away from authoritarian regimes as witnessed in some developing democracies/economies. Two-term presidential term limit is usually specified in the constitution as a point of restraining despotism in the presidential system of government as well as ensuring that elected presidents perform effectively. This is mostly true of states where elections are free, fair and credible. Thus, the re-election of an incumbent president for a maximum of a second term of four years is a sign of reward/confidence in the performance of the government in the past term of office. In turn, this implies that a government that failed to perform is voted-out of office after the first tenure. Scholars also recommend alternative measures for ensuring the good governance of elected presidents such as strict regulation of campaign finance and procedure, public funding of campaign and effective supervision of party activities and the compliance set out in the electoral law. This will ensure the emergence of

proactive leader(s) who will be adjudged credible for presidential position as party candidate(s) for general elections (Cheibub, 2000).

Advantages of Presidential System of Government

The Presidential system of government has the following advantages:

1. The location of power is clearly on the president and this makes it easier to hold the leader responsible for the failure or success of governmental activities.
2. The president uses veto power to curtail the excesses of the legislature thus giving credence to checks and balances.
3. There is a clear separation of powers in constitutional presidential system (not hybrid or parliamentary system)
4. There is flexibility for individuals in government to operate the system as opposed to the strict party loyalty in the parliamentary system.
5. The system creates relative space for public participation in the voting process and political debate.
6. It creates room for the stability of government and this does not rest on legislative manoeuvres such as using the vote of no confidence as obtains in the parliamentary system.

Disadvantages of Presidential System of Government

Some of the disadvantages of the presidential system of government include the following:

1. It is usually too expensive to operate.
2. It tends to concentrate enormous power on the president which could lead to dictatorship.

3. Ministers and other public officers appointed by the president may be used negatively.
4. It creates room for intense lobbying which could lead to corruption.
5. There is usually the executive-legislative tussle for supremacy which may adversely affect the pace of governance.

Meaning of Parliamentary System of Government

The Parliamentary system of government is also called the cabinet system of government; it is a constitutional practice whereby the government is formed by a political party with a majority of parliamentarians headed by a prime minister who is the head of government. In simple terms, the parliamentary system of government is a system of government in which the head of state is different from the head of government. The constitution may also provide for a ceremonial president/monarch who is the head of state, but less powerful than the prime minister. The president in this case may also be a king or queen as in a monarchy (Igwe, 2005, p.51).

Features of Parliamentary System of Government

Some of the characteristics of the parliamentary system of government include the following:

1. Cabinet (executive) is formed by majority parliamentarians from a political party in the parliament.
2. There is fusion of power between the executive and the legislature such that members of the executive are also members of the legislature.
3. The head of government (prime minister) is different from the head of state (president or monarch).
4. The cabinet (executive) is responsible to the parliament which has power to pass a vote of confidence or vote of no confidence.

5. There is the principle of collective responsibility of the cabinet to the parliament.
6. Supreme power rests in the parliament as it is not restrained by the constitution in law-making.

Modern Trends in Parliamentary System of Government

The Parliamentary system of government has its roots in Britain. It tends to provide the parliamentarians with better insight into the policies of government and the opportunity to fine-tune the actions of government for the betterment of the people. The head of state may be hereditary as in the case of Britain that practices monarchy. Similarly, the cabinet (ministers) are usually drawn from the lower house (House of Commons). The prime minister's term of office lasts insofar as he commands the majority support of the parliamentarians for any tenure of office. However, he may be removed by a majority vote of no confidence by the parliamentarians (Aniche, 2009).

Advantages of Parliamentary System of Government

Some of the advantages of parliamentary system of government include the following:

1. The union/fusion of executive/legislative powers helps to create stability and unity of purpose in government.
2. The principle of collective responsibility binds all parliamentarians to the policies of government.
3. It provides the parliamentarians the opportunity of better oversight since the cabinet are also members of the parliament.

4. It promotes party discipline since members have to vote along party lines to sustain their power in office.

Disadvantages of Parliamentary System of Government

Some of the disadvantages of parliamentary system of government include the following:

1. Restriction of cabinet/ministers to members of the parliament does not create room for hiring the best hands (technocrats and experts) in the state.
2. Cabinet members are over-worked since they are both members of the executive and members of the legislature; thus they may not perform optimally.

Meaning of Unitary System of Government

The Unitary system of government is a constitutional practice whereby the powers of government are concentrated on the central government of the state. The central government may delegate powers to localities as the need arises. The Unitary system of government is usually combined with the parliamentary system of government possibly because of the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the people of the state; or because they blend together (Igwe, 2005, p.456).

Features of Unitary System of Government

Some of the features of the unitary system of government include the following:

1. Powers of government are concentrated on the central government of the state.
2. There is usually ethnic and cultural homogeneity among the citizens
3. The constitution is usually flexible.

Advantages of Unitary System of Government

The major advantages of the unitary system of government include the following:

1. It is cheaper to operate than the federal system of government.
2. It is simple in organisation and flexible in operation since layers of interaction from centre to component units are eliminated.
3. Powers of government are concentrated on the centre, thus conflicts of authority are eliminated.
4. It provides greater unity among the citizens.
5. Decision-making by the government is usually faster because only the central government needs to consider issues of development.
6. It facilitates speedy and coordinated development.

Disadvantages of Unitary System of Government

Some disadvantages of unitary system of government include the following:

1. It promotes the domination of minority ethnic groups due to the absence of devolution of powers to the localities.
2. It may lead to a one-party dominance of the polity.
3. It may lead to dictatorship since it follows a central command structure.

Meaning of Federal System of Government

A federal system of government is a constitutional arrangement whereby the powers of government are shared between the central government and component

units (state, province) in a state. It operates mostly in a heterogeneous society, thus providing the opportunity for self-determination.

Reasons for Federalism

Some of the reasons for adopting federalism are:

1. The desire for union among the federating units of a state due to mutual benefits derivable.
2. The quest for relative autonomy of the federating units of a state due to cultural differences.
3. Geographical contiguity of federating units of a state may also necessitate adopting federalism.
4. The need to provide for robust security from external aggression.

Features of Federal System of Government

Some of the features of federal system of government include the following:

1. Powers of government are shared between the central government and the component units of the state.
2. The constitution is supreme above all other institutions in the state.
3. The constitution is usually rigid.

Modern Trends in Federal System of Government

Some states that practice the federal system of government include the United States of America, Canada, Australia and Nigeria. The central government in a federal state represents the federating units in external affairs as well as in internal affairs that are of common interest. The spheres of powers are usually specified in the constitution of the state. In the case of Nigeria, it is classified as

the exclusive legislative list, concurrent legislative list, and residual list. The exclusive legislative list specifies the powers of the central government; the concurrent legislative list specifies the powers of both the central government and the component units and the residual list specifies the powers of the component units of a state (Igwe, 2005, p.154). Another important point in Nigerian federalism is the fiscal federalism question. Fiscal federalism is defined by Aniche (2005, p.159) as “the sharing or allocation of public revenue between the central government and its constituent units on the basis of certain formulae or criteria as documented in the constitution.”

Advantages of Federal System of Government

The advantages of the federal system of government include the following:

1. It promotes unity in diversity among the ethnic groups that comprise the state.
2. It encourages decentralization and division of powers, thus making it convenient for government to function.
3. There is relative autonomy of the component units while enjoying state benefits.
4. It promotes administrative convenience for states with a large territory and population.
5. It creates convenience for minorities by allaying the fear of dominance.

Disadvantages of Federal System of Government

Some of the disadvantages of federalism include the following:

1. Tensions may arise in the state due to dissatisfaction arising from the division of power between the central government and the component units.

2. There may be a dominant influence of the majority ethnic groups over the minority ethnic groups in the state.
3. There is the tendency for overarching power of the central government over the component units which may lead to undue interferences
4. It encourages secession tendencies by disgruntled ethnic groups.
5. Allegiance of citizens to national issues is affected by ethnic and sectional interests.

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