
UNIT 6 TYPES OF REGIMES

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

African governments did not have the capacity to govern effectively. Given the underdeveloped economic system they inherited, many were unable to meet the social and economic needs of their populations. This situation led to a crisis of legitimacy. That is, the citizens became disillusioned with governments that could not provide jobs, education, and adequate health-care. Lack of government response led to growing popular dissatisfaction that exerted tremendous strain on the political system. Given these factors many African governments faced serious political problems within a few years of independence. One of the ways to deal with political crisis is to change the system of government. The 1960s witnessed the initiation of two types of governments as responses to the political crisis.

Almost all African countries that gained independence in the 1960s started out with multiparty systems. However, by the end of the 1960s, only a handful of African countries maintained the system. Indeed by 1970, half of the independent countries in Africa had military governments. In the first thirty years of the post-colonial era, more than half of the African countries experienced military rule. Only one African country, Botswana, maintained a multiparty system. What happened in the other twenty African countries that did not have military governments? In the 1960s and 1970s, these countries developed into *single* or *one-party systems*. It is noteworthy that one ostensible reason why democracy was abandoned was its perceived inability to bring about the desperately needed development. In fact, the two were regarded as antithetical in the African context. During a critical juncture when nation-building was a priority goal and time was considered of essence, especially given Africa's unenviable inheritance at independence, democracy was considered a luxury the continent could ill-afford. A decade after the end of the Cold War, virtually all the countries of Africa experienced a fluid and unstable political situation. During this period, both one-party and military regimes faced popular dissatisfaction throughout the continent. The people expressed their protest against the established order, oppression and misery. As a result many countries switched to pluralist systems from one-party and military regime. Thus the African continent witnessed the fall and rise of different types of regimes after independence,

6.2 UNITARY REGIME

In all the years of independence there was scarcely a country in tropical Africa, which retained a political system of competing parties. Gambia and Botswana were the prime exceptions. In a one-party or a unitary regime, only one political party exists. The chief executive, his cabinet members, the members of the legislature all belong to one political party. When there are elections, all the candidates belong to the same party. Constitutionally, there were two types of one-party regime that developed in Africa. Some countries became *de jure* one-party states. That is, the countries changed their constitutions so that only one political party was allowed in the country. Other African countries became *de facto* one-party states. In these countries, the Constitution was not changed to mandate one party, but in reality the ruling parties in these countries gained and kept monopoly power, dominating all branches of government. Now the question arises why did single party systems develop in Africa? The answers to this question can be sought in the weaknesses of the post-colonial systems. There are various arguments, which have been put forward in defence of a unitary regime.

Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda, first president of Zambia, were the most eloquent promoters of the unitary regime in Africa. President Kaunda and other supporters of one-party systems gave four broad reasons why a unitary system is necessary for new African states.

6.2.1 Tradition

Supporters of one-party systems claimed that multi-party systems were not part of Africa's pre-colonial tradition. They argued that a king or chief and his advisors governed traditional African kingdoms. The system did not allow for organised opposition to the king. In the many African societies that were de-centralised, decisions were made through discussion and consensus, not through argument by opposing groups. Proponents of a one-party system claimed that tradition supported their position.

6.2.2 Direct Democracy

Proponents of the unitary system argued that state and government systems inherited from the colonial governments were too far removed from the people to allow for democratic participation. They argued that the party—often the party that was responsible for winning independence—was a better instrument to listen to and represent the will of the people.

6.2.3 National Unity

In the immediate post-independence period many of the political parties were ethnic- or region-based. This meant that political parties often represented ethnic or regional interests. Proponents of unitary systems argued that multi-party systems in Africa encouraged ethnic and regional rivalries. Only a single national party could heal these divisions and help achieve national unity. They pointed out that in view of the manifold tasks confronting the new states, it was but essential that political power should rest in a unified leadership as represented by the governing party.

6.2.4 Development Orientation

Proponents of the one-party system asserted that in such a regime, the ruling party would not have to spend most of its energies on winning elections and staying in power. Further, the lack of adequate

resources and manpower required that national resources be mobilised fully rather than frittered away in fruitless squabbles among the parties. In a unitary regime a secure party would focus its energies on listening to the people and developing policies that meet social and economic needs of the people:

Fortified by these arguments, various African governments proceeded to establish a unitary regime with a set of fairly common measures. These measures can be grouped under three heads: [1] neutralisation or conversion of the opposition; [2] associational integration; and [3] constitutional innovations. The first method involved rulers rewarding those who supported them and punishing those who did not. During the first years of independence, a fairly large number of opposition groups crossed over to the side of the ruling parties as they realised the futility of retaining their separate identity. Where subtler techniques of neutralising the opposition failed, preventive detention, press censorship, imprisonment and exile of opposition leaders became a routine prior to the imposition of the one-party regime.

The second category of measures consisted of co-opting other organisations and associations into the ruling party by establishing links and by framing such laws as would render any activity outside the party well-nigh impossible.

The third category of measures comprised electoral and constitutional innovations. One of the common and effective innovations had been the single-list electoral system by which all members of a national legislature were elected on a single platform.

In a unitary regime the party in power had a complete monopoly over the state machinery. The centralised character of the government has been its distinctive feature. The formal powers of the chief executive are formidable; but the informal powers he exercises can neither be enumerated nor defined. It is he who lends legitimacy to the political system and makes it a "going concern". As such the personalised aspect of the system is highly exaggerated. Nevertheless he functions under several constraints, which may derive their origins from the peculiar socio-economic and political conditions of each country.

Superficially the unitary regimes may appear similar yet there are differences. The differences lie in the socio-economic conditions and the ideological predilections of the leaders. As for instance, there is a basic difference between the Ivory Coast system and other one-party regimes. Unlike the Ivory Coast where the ruling PDCI de-linked politics from economics, in other unitary regimes the state intervened in the economy.

The success and failure of unitary regimes depended upon the capabilities of the ruling parties to realise the goals they had set themselves. Now the question arises what is their record in Africa? The answer to this question is quite complex. But one way to answer this question is to look at the response of the citizens of the countries that had one-party systems. When, in the 1990s, citizens were given the opportunity to choose between the continuation of a one-party system, or to have multi-party organisations, the citizen of each country overwhelmingly voted for a system that allowed multiple voices to be heard.

6.3 MILITARY REGIME

By 1970, half of the independent countries in Africa had military governments. Instead of elected civilians, the government was controlled by the military. The process by which a group of the

forces personnel takes control of the government is called a *coup d'etat* — this is a French term that means an overthrow of the state. Some *coup d'etats* were quite violent. In the process of taking control, the soldiers killed members of the civilian government, including, at times, the President. However, some *coup d'etats* were also non-violent. In these cases, the military simply surrounded the presidential palace and the civilian government surrendered peacefully. Now the question arises: Why were there so many military *coups* just a few years after these countries became independent?

African governments inherited a weak political system from the colonial era. Consequently, the first African governments did not have the capacity to govern effectively. Military leaders, apprehending that their countries would fall apart politically, decided that they could do a better job of governing.

Given the underdeveloped economic systems they inherited, many African governments were unable to meet the social and economic needs of their countries. This situation often led to a *crisis of legitimacy*. That is, the citizens became disillusioned with governments that could not provide basic social and economic services, such as jobs, education, and adequate health-care. Military *coup* leaders in Africa often justified their accession to power on the ground that the prior civilian government had been unable to meet these basic needs.

The political environment of the early post-colonial years gave rise to ethnic tensions that at times became so severe as to threaten the political system. The military claimed a right to intervene and take power in order to stop ethnic and regional rivalries from developing into a civil war.

The strains on the political system in the early years of independence provided an environment in which *corruption* was widely prevalent in some African countries. Government officials, often frustrated by their inability to be effective, used their government position to benefit themselves and members of their family. Military leaders often used the pretext of widespread corruption to justify their taking power.

This is quite a list of weaknesses in the post-independence governments in Africa. Indeed, so fed up were the citizens of some countries, that they actually welcomed the early military coups. However, military regimes are not democratic; indeed, one of the first things that military governments do is dissolve the legislative branch of government. Moreover, military governments in Africa were no more successful than their civilian counterparts in addressing the political, social, and economic issues, which provided the environment in which the *coup d'etat* took place. The administrative apparatus presided over by the military came to resemble more and more the colonial model. There is an overemphasis on centralisation with greater reliance on the bureaucracy to run the affairs of the state. At the local level, chiefly authorities (especially in Ghana and Nigeria) have been resurrected in order apparently to promote decentralisation, but in reality to forge an alliance with the rural elites. The attitude is strongly reminiscent of the British policy of indirect rule. But there is an important difference between the colonial administration and the military regime. For, however callous and exploitative colonial administration might have been, it complied with the rules and regulations prescribed by the metropolitan governments. In comparison, a military ruler recognises no restrictions on his authority. Besides, he rules largely by administrative fiats and in most cases without recourse to the due process of law. In Zaire, for instance, a mere wish of president Mobutu acquired the force of law. In Ghana, the NRC (National Reformation Council) headed by Colonel Acheampong passed a Subversion Decree in July 1972 which made punishable with retrospective effect any attempt at organising or inciting anyone to strike a sentence of fifteen to thirty years of imprisonment. Meanwhile, the incidence of violence attending General Amin's rise to power reduced Uganda, in the words of the International Commission of Jurists, into "a lawless state."

The performance of the military regimes belies the hope that they can bring about any substantial improvement in either the administration or society. That the soldiers, with their orientation to “modernisation” would impart cohesiveness and unity to the nation dimmed as tribal or regional pulls began to make themselves felt in both the army and the administration. Also the incidence of corruption, wastage and mismanagement of public funds has registered an upward curve under military rule. Further, since their primary concern has been the preservation of their own hegemony as a privileged group, it seems unlikely that they can ever become an agent of social change.

In spite of popular opposition to military rule, between 1960 and 1985 there were 131 attempted *coups* in Africa, of which 60 were successful! And three countries have had six successful military coups. Indeed, out of the 54 independent African countries, only six countries have not experienced an attempted or successful *coup* since they became independent.

6.4 AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

One conclusion that can be drawn is that whether the state is controlled by a dominant party or by a military *junta*, its central tendency is that it becomes authoritarian as power and influence are personalised and centralised. The leaders rest explicitly on the pre-eminence of the executive authority, usually represented by the bureaucracy, sometimes by the party organisation. In an authoritarian regime the superiority of the executive, over the legislature and judiciary is well attested. Presidentialism, whether civilian or military, reflects formal shift of power from the legislature to the chief executive. The president enjoys a pre-eminent position and personal rule prevails.

An authoritarian regime is integrative for it consolidates diverse forces and gives initially authority and legitimacy to one person to dominate the policy process. The autocrat dominates the political system, commanding and managing rather than presiding and bargaining. An authoritarian regime or personal rule is an antithesis of institutionalised rule. Instead of constitutional rule and conventions that effectively limit political power, systems of personal rule are characterised by the degree of discretion permitted by the ruler, and by a dynamic interplay of personal authority and power.

How then did the authoritarian regime establish its foothold in the post-independent period of nation-building in Africa? Given that African societies were riddled with ethnic divisions and having the potential for real and grave conflict, they needed to be governed with a firm and steady hand. According to nationalist formulation, democratic liberties would only inflame ethnic rivalries, stimulate ethnic sub-national tendencies that had happened in several countries during the run up to independence and pose a danger to nation-state or national integration. The authoritarian alternative proved appealing for another reason. By fostering national integration and maintaining domestic tranquillity, African states expected to be spared the ruinous financial and manpower expenses of trying to put out ethnic fires once they had been lit by democratic liberties. The savings could then be utilised to respond to pressing social needs. Furthermore, it was suggested that democracy was alien to, hence incompatible with, traditional African political culture in which the chiefs or councils of elders embodied the collective interest and decided for their people.

But authoritarianism failed to produce either the developmental outcomes it had promised or the national unity and integration. Indeed, forty years of authoritarianism failed to produce a single case of a developmentalist regime (growth with development) as Taiwan, Korea, and China or even authoritarian growth regimes (growth without development or welfare) as Brazil under the military junta. Instead, all that African neo-patrimonialism managed was to nurture Authoritarian State Elite Enrichment Regimes (ASEEs), of which the plutocratic Mobutu state was only the most

celebrated example. The latter type of authoritarian regime produced neither growth nor welfare; its main aim was the enrichment of the elite with monopoly control of the state. It was often based on erratic autocratic rule by a supreme leader whose actions may not have made much sense when judged against the standards of formal development goals preferred by the state but are perfectly rational from the perspective of patron-client list politics.

By the late 1980s, the authoritarian regimes had turned out to be disasters. Instead of economic growth, Africa had been reeling from a decade or more of bad policies, bad government, natural disasters (devastating drought and bush fires in the 1970s) and a series of external shocks—unfavourable world market conditions for primary commodities and two devastating oil price hikes at both ends of the 1970s. The resultant economic failures and political instability pushed African states into being international recipient offunds, making the continent ripe for external co-option of its policy making by international financial institutions, most notably the IMF and the World Bank. Thus, virtually all the African countries were forced to embrace a new economic ideology, which represented at the same time a fundamental shift in economic policy-making from state ownership and central economic planning to neo-liberal economic orthodoxy. The new policy framework, called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), had been mandated in return for balance of payments and other policy supports.

6.5 PLURALIST REGIME

A decade after the end of the Cold War, virtually all the African countries are experiencing a fluid and unpredictable political situation. The party and military regimes face popular discontent throughout the continent. Masses of people are agitating for political pluralism and have expressed their protest against the established order, oppression, chronic poverty and consequent misery. United, they have risen to reject oppressive rulers and their slogans. Increasingly, democracy, multi-party governance and popular participation have become dominant themes in all discussions—economic and political.

Democracy and better governance came in a big way on the African agenda in the late 1980s. The Khartoum Declaration of 1988 specifically called for the guarantee of basic individual freedom and democratic participation to ensure accountability on the part of those in authority. In 1986, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights came into force after ratification by about 40 countries. An important addition to these efforts was the 1990 Arusha Declaration embodied in the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, which received widespread endorsement of the OAU. The Arusha Declaration had put forward a proposal to African governments for democratisation, popular participation and better governance. These declarations coincided with the changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The Western powers, which had been aiding the authoritarian regimes because of their pro-Western stance, have now amended their Africa policy. They now insist on political liberalism and "good governance".

The impact of the collapse of Communist regimes under the pressure of mass demonstration and mass action encouraged the anti-government forces in Africa to rebel. The upsurge for change first appeared in the West African state of Benin in 1989 and steadily gained momentum in the following years until it swept through virtually all African countries. In the early 1990s it acquired the proportions of a storm that has shaken regimes and ushered in political pluralism in Gabon, Congo, Mali, the Central African Republic, Cameroon, Niger, Togo, Zaire, Sao Tome and Principe, Cape Verde, Somalia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Zambia and Kenya. African political scientists have

called the decade of the 1990s Africa's *Second Liberation* or Africa's *Second Independence*. These terms reflect important political changes that have taken place in Africa during this decade. In the 1980s, only five African countries held competitive elections: Botswana, Gambia, Mauritius, Senegal, and Zimbabwe. However in the 1990s, 40 African countries held multiparty elections that, according to international observers, were free and fair.

Violent protests in countries like Gabon, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Kenya, Somalia, Zaire and others reflect spontaneity and outrage at the monopolisation of power by civilian and military autocrats. Protests were also against the amassing of personal wealth through corrupt and dishonest practices and compradorial activities.

The quick change has been energised by complex and diverse elements. The Western powers: which had not been critical of the one-party and the military regimes in Africa before the fall of the socialist one-party system in Europe, had now taken up the question of pluralisation of African politics. The Bretton Woods institutions closely linked their development aid to heavily dependent African states with the introduction of multi-party system.

What are the factors that contributed to this movement towards pluralist regimes?

6.5.1 Internal Factors

Demand for Human Rights and Participation: Citizens in most African countries expressed their dissatisfaction with governments that were corrupt and not responsive to the needs of the people.

Civil Society: The concept of civil society applies to all public organisations that are not directly engaged in politics. Public organisations of civil society include religious organisations-churches, mosques, synagogues-educational institutions, service clubs (Rotary, Lions, League of Women Voters), professional organisations and trade unions. A vibrant civil society is important to democracy.

The combination of opposition from groups in civil society with the voices of ordinary citizens provided a powerful expression for democracy and responsive government throughout Africa.

6.5.2 International Factors

Democracy in Eastern Europe: In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe underwent a transition to democratic government.

Democracy in East and South Eastern Asia: During the same period, countries in East and South East Asia that had authoritarian governments also underwent a transition to democracy.

Democracy World Over: The global movements for Democracy provided strong encouragement to citizens in African countries who were working for more democratic systems in their countries.

End of the Cold War: Both super powers helped to create and maintain some of the most tin-democratic governments in post-colonial Africa. When the Cold War ended around 1990, the United States and the Soviet Union no longer had any reason to support their forin-el-allies. Consequently, authoritarian governments in Africa failed to resist internal forces for democratic change.

In analysing the new situations in Africa in the last decade, three scenarios emerge. First, the demand for pluralism is a democratic claim. Second, simultaneously, this demand is against the

state and is not linked to the struggle against neo-colonial dominance. Third, the multi-party formula is by no means a panacea, an end in itself and therefore, its mere practice is not expected to ensure democratic performance, social and economic development and an end to corruption.

6.6 SUMMARY

In this Unit we have tried to discuss different types of regimes operating in Africa in an historical context. Almost all African countries that gained independence in the 1960s started out with multi-party systems but only Botswana and Gambia could retain this system. Others became unitary or military regimes. It was claimed that multiparty systems were not traditional and too far removed from people to be democratic. Also, many parties were religious or ethnic in nature. In contrast, a one-party system would not have to spend energy on staying in power but focus on development. Reasons for a military take-over were the incapacity of many governments to effectively meet social and economic needs of the countries and stop ethnic rivalries but the military governments too, could not meet the basic needs of people. Authoritarian rule as an alternative to military rule was appealing because it was felt that ethnic rivalries could be controlled and attention focused on more pressing needs. But authoritarianism too failed by the 1980s. Anti-government forces rebelled and by 1990s, forty African countries held multi-party elections leading to pluralist regimes. It remains to be seen if this regime will live up to the hopes and expectations of the people.

6.7 EXERCISES

- 1) What were the arguments put forth in defence of a unitary regime by the promoters of such a regime?
- 2) Elucidate the factors responsible for the emergence of authoritarian regimes in Africa?
- 3) What factors were responsible for change of regime from one-party or the military to a multiparty regime in Africa?
- 4) What are the fears and uncertainties associated with a pluralist regime?