

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE PROPORTIONAL AND SINGLE MEMBER ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Dr. A.S.K Norman*

ABSTRACT

Electoral systems are pertinent if representation and translation of votes is of honor. While elections are important part of democracy, electoral systems ensures proper translation of the votes attained by political parties and contestants. Hence, there are many electoral systems practiced in the world, however the most popular in Africa are the Constituency – single member electoral systems and the Proportional representation. Therefore, this article provides a comparative analysis of the two systems. The study has utilized documentations and observation as the leading data collection strategies. The first part is the introduction, which reveals essentials of electoral systems. The article also provides a comparative analysis, which reveals advantages and disadvantages of the two systems through pictorial narrations. The article concludes that the value of an election to democracy is either enhanced or reduced depending on the nature of an electoral system being used. Whereas an election is basically a process of choosing leaders, an electoral system is a method or instrument of expressing that choice and translating votes into parliamentary seats or representative seats. The article concludes that, the system of elections matters as far as representation and good governance is concerned. The more the system can translate the votes into the seats the more feasible will be.

Keywords: Electoral systems, Votes, Representation

* Teofilo Kisanji University, Tanzania

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Electoral system is derived from a noun election, which refers to the process of choosing representatives (Norman, 2009). Hence, an electoral system is a method or instrument of expressing that choice and translating votes into councilors, parliamentary and presidential seats. In some countries electoral systems expresses the choice of voters in electing presidents, prime ministers, governors and senators. The electoral system sets criteria for one to win as opposed to a mere win. The essence of electoral systems is to translate as much as possible the votes into seats. There have been situations where the number of votes attained does not reflect the majority people participated in the entire election.

In some cases representatives may water down the essence of representation. With proper electoral system, it is anticipated that the elected person should get support of more than half of the people that participate in voting, of course, pending the rules governing the elections. In plural politics, particularly in Africa, the contestant that gets the greater number compared to others is declared a winner. In some other countries such as France, when the winner has failed to get more than a half of the votes cast, a rerun is conducted where only the top two vie the entire post. Of course the logic towards this is to ensure that the elected representative is actually supported by more than a half of electors/voters. Nevertheless, in youthful democracy, there are some contradictions on the winner in an election. For example in the by elections that were conducted in Zanzibar in 2004, where 11 elections were contested; all contestants who were declared winners had actually received less than a half of votes cast (NEC, 2005).

The reason for the results is due the fact that Civic United Front contestants were declared ineligible for not complying with rules and regulations of the Commission. Hence, the voters who were believed to be in support of CUF decided to vote for their members since were still appearing on ballot papers. The votes were termed void (spoiled). The benefits for the process went to Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM), which saw some of its contestants winning at the expense of 2/3 votes, which were spoiled. In this regard the winners were actually representing less than a half of the voters. The question could be who then were they representing? Obvious the concern is on electoral system that translates votes into seats.

Another concern is on the number of people backing the voters. Here the pertinent question is on the number of people represented in the house of representative commonly known as parliament. For example while the number of people represented in Tanzania mainland per constituency is about 100,000 and above, on the contrary the number of people represented in the Tanzania Island is, in some constituency, about 8,000 (NEC,1995; 2000; 2005). In such circumstances the need for an electoral system is vital to harness the two. For obvious reason if one part of the country particularly the mainland has a member of parliament representing 150,000 people and another representing 10,000 particularly in Tanzania Zanzibar, the time spent for discharging the responsibilities for members of parliament would differ. Even the effectiveness of the constituency allowance if paid will not render the same value. Hence, electoral systems pave a way to give a proper value of those elected and the represented.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

An electoral system should also accommodate the geographical concern of the people represented. Makete constituency and Ludewa are both less populated than Kinondoni and Temeke in Dar es Salaam, but time spent for collecting views by representatives can be the same, and at times the rural constituency can cost much time compared to what would take for populated but urban constituency. In dynamic world where views and ideas of the represented are collected, then another emergent factor would be the level of technology of the people represented. Urban populations are generally literate. Hence, the time spent to collect views and even understanding the views of the people is less compared of the considered illiterate population. This, suggest for critical thinking to the electoral management body on factors considered for demarcating the constituency. Obviously, as Norman (2005) puts it, institutions should verge into competence in developing credentials that suit the people. Since, even the rules and regulations we echo are and or were created by the people whom we sometime accuse-though the laws the accused made are respected. This suggest that rules and regulations, and in general terms laws have to be reviewed to suit the competent population. And to avoid frequent review, systemic thinking when making laws, remains to be prudent in preserving sustainability (Norman, 2003; Midmore, 1997; WCE, 1995).

Another concern on electoral system is on examining the prime duties of the representatives popularly known as members of parliament and councilors. The real duties of the representatives is to represent the people on exercising the cardinal functions of the Council for the case of councilors, and Parliament for the case of members of parliament-summed up as making laws and oversight to the government- the executives. Yet elections management bodies and the public can be jeopardized through whims that are created by wronging in exercising the same. When the wrong exercise is left to hover for a long time or substantive time, the tendency is to get swayed and perceive the wrong to be the right. For example, in most developing countries the role of legislature, and particularly the components that form it, in this regard the members of parliament are perceived to be instrumental in, for example, providing roads, schools, water, electricity and health centers to mention, but some. There are substantive literatures that indicate the importance of pertinent electoral systems (Commonwealth, 1992; 2002; Adedayo, 1991; Goodwin-Gill, 1994; Chaligha, 1995; Max et al, 1994).

Thus representatives that seem to have not provided such things are considered inferior. We anticipate that such provisions are essentially of the government. Oversight on implementing the same can be done by the representatives. What is happening now is for members of parliament to solicit funds, some from their own salaries and income to do what is considered the needful. Constituencies when are looked at with an eye to examine the prime functions of the representatives, sufficing for individual needs (personal interest) will be ignored. We understand however, that in some countries including East Africa, which has not established an agreed number and area for qualifying a constituency; many other emergent credentials might be developed to suit political regimes, whims, history, favor and even bias. In the same vein, Norman (2009) asserts that when credentials are not set, whims, favor, which can even mean tribalism, religion, regions, geographical boundaries, and political affiliations, would be inevitable. To date is of no wonder to find representatives implementing the functions known to be of the government.

Electoral systems should facilitate dignity and legitimacy of those representing and the represented. In this vein, Nigeria for example has 36 governance states (gubernatorial). The electoral system requires that for a presidential candidate to be declared president must win 24

gubernatorial states. The logic is to have a president who has won 2/3 of the states (constituency). In some cases there may exist a political party which has majority votes, but won less electorate (constituencies) hence contradicting with the key principle of election which is “translating the votes into seats as much as possible”. Electoral systems are there to do away with the contradiction of people represented and the people representing. In Tanzania, for example the mainland population is about 46 million people, which are represented by 232 members of parliament as on year 2010. In Zanzibar, the population is about 1 million and is represented by about 51 members of parliament. Of course the same number plus the a third of it represents Zanzibar to the Parliament of United Republic of Tanzania. The ratio for the representation is massively different. However, histories and culture can facilitate the type of an electoral system. That is why there is no supra electoral system that is suitable to all countries. Nevertheless, any electoral system has to end up providing a facilitative role of improving the lives of the governed (people). Electoral systems should not render unnecessary chaos of expenditure of the entire country.

An electoral system is thus a set of electoral laws, principles and mechanisms that specify the methods by which votes are translated into seats in the process of electing representatives to public office. There are almost as many electoral systems as there are countries, this article will not deal with all electoral systems but will focus on those that are mostly used. Before delving into the systems, it is fair to give the commonly accepted values/considerations that are always taken into account in the design of the Electoral System. Generally, in all cases the electoral systems are influenced by a country’s particular conditions including its history, culture, politics and demographic composition. Some countries may wish to design an electoral system that will provide incentives for national reconciliation especially for countries that have had conflict or political strife. Some systems will encourage political parties to make inclusive appeals for electoral support outside their own core vote base – recently the South African Electoral System had inclusively as one of the cornerstones. Accountability is one of the bedrocks of representative government as it provides a check on individuals once elected. A viable and accountable political system is one where both the government and the elected members of parliament are responsible to their constituencies to the highest degree possible.

Accountability depends on the degree of geographic accountability, which is largely dependent on the size and territorial nature of the constituencies. In Lesotho for instance, because of the terrain topography and the size of the constituencies accountability is blurred principle. There is other systems in which member of the legislature can be recalled if enough votes in their constituencies demand. Other systems make use of direct democracy mechanisms such as referenda. The electoral system should ensure the presence of a viable parliamentary opposition that can critically assess legislation, safeguard minority rights. An electoral system must have prospects for a stable and efficient government, the important criteria in this regard is whether people perceive the system to be fair when government can efficiently enact legislation and govern and whether the system avoids discriminating against particular parties or interest groups, the electoral system make elections accessible and meaningful, elections are well and good but they mean little to people if it is difficult to vote or at the end of the day, their vote makes no difference to the way the nation is governed, the choice of an electoral system can influence the legitimacy of institutions. The electoral system must create an environment where the voting is easy and in this particular case a number of issues influence the assessments viz. how easy it is for a voter to get to polling station, how up-to-date is the electoral roll, how simple is ballot paper.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study has utilized documentary and observation as the leading data collection strategies. The extensive experience of the author on electoral supervision, observation, and consultancy especially on electoral systems development has also been valuable collection strategies in the study. The study utilized a case study design, though some countries have been mapped to substantiate the argument in the discussions.

4.0 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The comparative analysis of the systems depends much on the nature of governance of the respective country. For instance the disadvantages will differ slightly between the two countries using the constituency system, while differing on other qualities such as separation or lack of separation between the executives and national assembly/legislature. In some countries, such as Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda the law states that the minister shall be drawn or appointed from the

House of Representatives, thus enabling the minister to exercise both the administration of policies and the formulation of laws. Kenya as of the year 2010 started to reform the constitution and thus changes are anticipated as there are indications that Ministers would be drawn without the parliament. This will have adverse impact to the weaknesses or strengths of the systems. In Rwanda for example ministers are drawn without the parliament, and in circumstance, the President nominates a member of parliament into the cabinet (team of ministers) such member will have to automatically loose the representation power. Hence, the extent of separation of power would always alter the effectiveness of the electoral system in one way or the other. Therefore, the discussed system bellow assumes that there is a separation of power. However, the table will follow to analyze the pros and cons of the systems when there is no separation of power.

The major advantage of the Proportional Representation (PR) system is that it relates representation directly to the number of votes cast in favor of that particular party. For example in an election where there are three political parties (R, S, T) contesting say 200 seats: party R secures 20% of the votes, party S secures 50% of the votes and party T secures 30% of the votes, the allocation of seats will be 40 seats for party R, 100 seats for party S and 60 seats for party T. So in this case the contesting parties would be allocated seats in direct proportion to the number of votes that were cast in their favor. In terms of democratic representation therefore proportional representation is fairer in that it directly relates to the votes cast. Thus political rights would be exercised without being subordinated by the ideological influence.

Another advantage of proportional representation is that it is very simple to administer and therefore much less costly (Bunge Digest, 1997) hence favoring political rights of women as most of them indicate that finance is the second most pressing hindrance to participation in political system (Chana, 2004). In proportional representation system, there is no need of demarcating constituencies and no need of by elections. The whole country is treated as one constituency and voting is on the basis of lists issued by the political parties taking part in the election. For example, if a Member of Parliament belonging to party "A" dies or resigns; party "A" simply submits the name of the candidate next on the list. The financial saving is considerable (Bunge, 1997:41). In Tanzania, there had been 21 parliamentary by elections so far from 1995 to the 2000

And some 16 from Zanzibar and four from Tanzania Mainland were held in the year 2003 (NEC, 2006). Each by-election costs the country between two to three hundred million shillings (about 300,000 USD). From 2005 to 2009 the total by elections conducted in Tanzania were five costing the nation about Tanzania shillings 1.5 billion equal to US dollar 1.5 million. Under proportional representation the named amount of money would not be incurred. We anticipate the cost for the same to keep on declining due to the establishment of Permanent National Voters Register (PNVR).

Proportional representation tends to minimize personal mudsling and, indeed corruption. The individual prospective Member of Parliament is not vulnerable to the whims and demands of the voters. Indeed, he does not have to incur a lot of election expenses as mainly his political party or organization conducts the election campaign.

Whereas in the case of single member constituency elections, the focus is on the individuals, since women are the victims of intimidation from culture and traditions as discussed earlier, this works much in favor of hindrance than promoting women participation in political system. In the case of proportional representation the focus is on the political parties or organizations and what they stand for. In other words the focus is on issues rather than personality. This is extremely important for a country that is serious about development and utilization of balanced political right. The party articulates its policies and programs and publishes a list of the people who will articulate and implement those policies and programs.

Under the single member constituency system the party does not necessarily get the right candidate. Very often it has candidates forced upon it, selected on the basis of local wheeling and dealing (Boman in Bunge Digest, 1997:19). So the party may end up with candidates who do not necessarily subscribe to its policies and programs. This is a great disadvantage to political parties and indeed the country if elections are going to turn in contestants who do not believe in any particular philosophy or who do not subscribe to any particular program. Certainly the trend has been a reality in many parts of Africa including Tanzania and Kenya where members of Parliament and contestants from one party would shift to another party immediately after losing the nominations within their parties or the entire election. Although this trend has many other

factors including poor administration of nominations within such parties, but it can also suggest lack of true affiliation of the contestants to the respective parties.

Further, the system of proportional representation tends to give political parties such enormous clout that the tendency is for prospective candidates to try and curry favor with the party. This can lead to minimizing corruption within the political parties.

In addition, the system of single member constituencies does not promote national cohesion (Good-win, 1993). It provides for a party to dominate seats even in circumstance that it would take few seats if votes were the sole determinant of number seats of each political party.

Table 1.1: Table indicating the number of votes for political party R and T versus the Seats won

R/T		R/T		R/T		R/T	
200/180	R	100/125	T	100/70	R	300/280	R
230/20	R	200/198	R	70/72	R	250/550	T
100/400	T	60/120	T	130/120	R	200/470	T
50/54	T	600/900	T	59/71	T	230/490	T
120/198	T	315/305	R	50/49	R	170/390	T
300/290	R	270/230	R	30/27	R	200/190	R
56/49	R	34/40	T	50/45	R	279/269	R
200/150	R	20/90	R	200/185	R	300/301	T
100/120	T	70/75	T	250/244	R	300/270	R
225/300	T	100/290	T	200/190	R	250/240	R

Source: Norman, A. S. (2004). Sample developed to indicate the pros and cons of proportional versus single member constituency systems, Dar es Salaam.

4.1 THE ELECTIONS RESULT FOR THE TWO PARTIES R AND T

Part T attained 17 seats versus 23 of R. However the number of votes for T is 8657 and for R is 6967. If the system for such election would be First Past the Post, which is winner takes all the result will be as indicated above (i.e. T = 17 seats and R = 23 seats).

Despite the fallout, T attained more votes than R by 1690. One would expect T to have more seats than R. But the system used, dictated the votes translation. The purpose of elections is ensuring attainment of leaders from the majority of electors. It can be noted clearly that the votes have been suppressed as could not reflect the winner in terms of majority voters. Rather demarcations of constituencies have been an advantage to part R leaving suppression to party T. Since the bias of rules governing elections may lead into unfair of the election, one may argue therefore that elections conducted under systems that do not translate votes into seats they are unfair from the apparent face of them. Freeness of an election is determined through voting freely without being coerced. It can be added that at times, when one is declared a winner while has attained less votes than other contestants is in fact a “technical” coercion and suppression. That is why rerun is imperative, particularly when seeking a nomination within the party (Norman, 2010).

On the same case if the elections were to be determined through proportional representation the computation would be:

Total number of votes is 15524
 Total number of seats is 40
 Votes attained by R is 6967
 Votes attained by T is 8657

Party R will be allocated $6967/15524 \times 100\% = 44.87\% \times 40 \text{ seats} = 18 \text{ seats}$

Party T will be allocated $8657/15524 \times 100\% = 55.76\% \times 40 \text{ seats} = 22 \text{ seats}$.

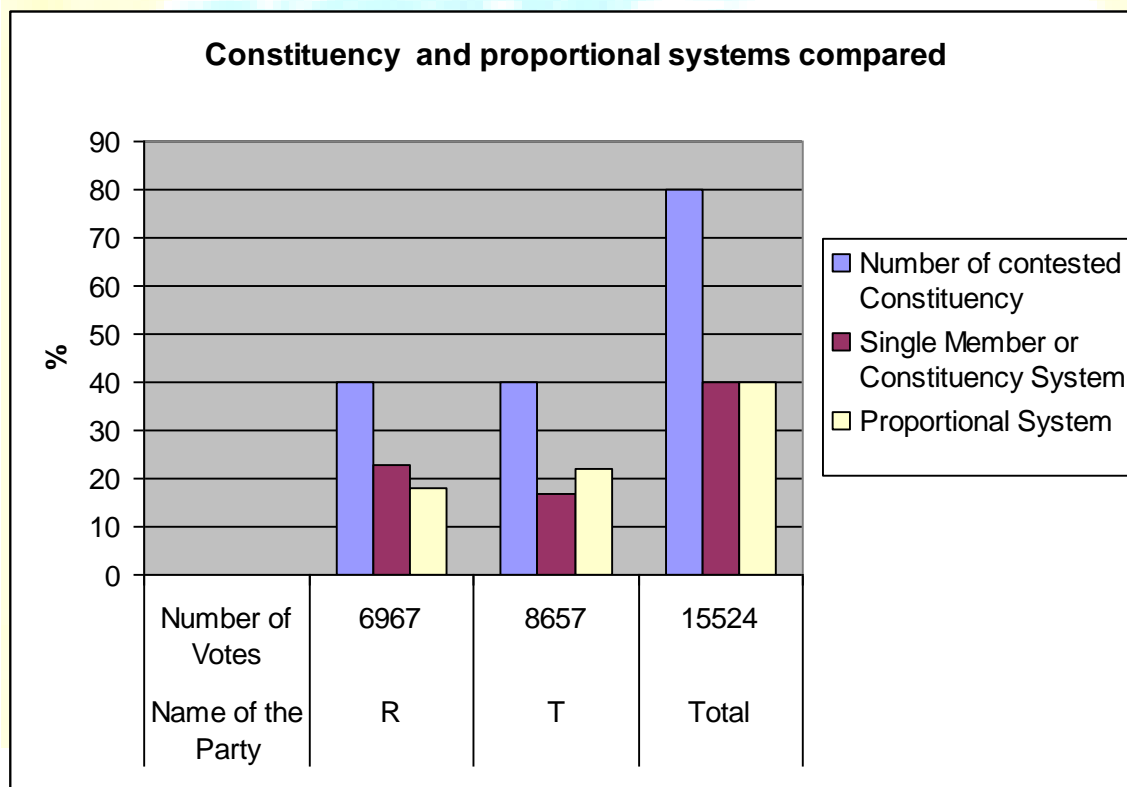
Table 1:2 The Table bellow summarizes the number of seats in FPP and PR systems

		Number of	Single	
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Name of the Party	Number of Votes	contested Constituency	Member or Constituency System	Proportional System
R	6967	40	23	18
T	8657	40	17	22
Total	15524	80	40	40

Source: Norman, A. S. (2008) Data analysis indicating the pros and cons of PR versus FPP, Dar es Salaam.

Table 1.3: Constituency and Proportional Representation Compared



Source: Norman, A, S. 2008, Pictorial narration as developed by the Africa Network of Elections Observers and Peace Builders International, ANEOPI

Nevertheless when translating the votes basing on the number of votes, party T emerged the winner. It can be realized that where the electoral management body is biased can, in one way or

the other, temper with the constituency boundaries for favoring a certain regime. Finally yet importantly, the question of election expenses needs to be seriously addressed. Elections have become too costly, not only to the state but also to candidates. By-elections, which are unavoidable in single member constituencies, lead the state in even more expense. These expenses would be substantially reduced if the system of proportional representation, or a modified version of it, were to be introduced. Under the constitution a comprehensive review of the number of constituencies and their boundaries has to be carried out every ten years. This is an extremely costly exercise. With a system of proportional representation this exercise is avoided.

Suggestions have been made that Tanzania switches completely from the system of single member constituencies to that of proportional representation. While the arguments for such suggestions are very strong, it is the belief of the author that a complete switch is neither necessary, nor desirable. As indicated earlier each system has its advantages and disadvantages. A wholesale replacement of the present system would make Tanzania lose the advantages or strong points of the present system. Even in psychological terms an abrupt switch has its problems. Any new system has to be digested by the people competent to do so. Adequate preparation of changing a system that has been in use since independence would necessarily need to be long and painstaking. It is not necessary to switch over completely to a new system. A mixture of the two systems would in to some of us be the wisest thing to do. A number of seats could be reserved to be filled through the system of proportional representation in the same way as a certain percentage of seats are reserved for women under the present constitution.

A way of avoiding such foreseeable cost has to be found. One such way is to introduce proportional representation. For example the number of constituencies could be limited, while the remaining seats are treated through proportional representation. At one time in Tanzania, each administrative district also constituted an electoral constituency. There are 131 (the number can change since the president has mandate to alter boundaries) administrative districts on mainland Tanzania today. Tanzania could revert to this system of determining constituencies. Such electoral reform could be introduced in time for the elections of the year 2005 and or 2010. This will allow enough time for the necessary amending legislation and all the administrative steps

needed for the reform. The time between now and the introduction of the reforms would also be used to educate the people, including the present parliamentarians.

There is always a tendency to fear change or new ideas. However, in this case introducing a system of proportional representation, albeit mixed, is not a shoot in the dark. A system has worked in many countries including some countries in Africa. The sum total of what we are trying to say is that there are strengths and weaknesses in either system; the ideal situation may therefore lie in using both systems, taking the good points in each system and trying to minimize the weak points. The government of Rwanda has switched to what can be considered as total separation of power, particularly between the executives and the members of parliament. The president appoints ministers from any organ but not from the members of parliament. In case the President is willing to appoint the minister from members of parliament such a member would be required to resign the membership to the Parliament. The current amendments of the constitution of Kenya certainly appeals for such transformation to other African countries including the East African community. Norman (2005) asserts the importance of separation of powers, particularly the need to appoint ministers who are not members of parliament.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that elections are a crucial, albeit not the only, ingredient of democratic transformation. The value of an election to a democracy is either enhanced or reduced depending on the nature of an electoral system being used. Whereas an election is basically a process of choosing leaders, an electoral system is a method or instrument of expressing that choice and translating votes into councilors/governors, parliamentary/senatorial and presidential seats. To conclude therefore, the system of elections matters as far as representation and good governance is concerned. The more the system can translate the votes into the seats the more feasible will be. The challenges for electoral systems however is to what extent African governments relate the system developed or assimilated and the role of such systems in facilitating development of the entire nation. Governing machinery and the systems accompanied should focus on easing the livelihood of the people, hence development. As Norman (2005) puts it, the first and foremost essence of any regime is to improve the livelihood of the people, hence development must be thought systemically when creating any policy including adoption of an electoral system.

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