

## **1.0. POLITICAL PARTIES AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

### **1.1. POLITICAL PARTIES, POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ROLES**

A political institution is an organization set up to meet certain political goals and objectives. A political party is a key political institution in a state. A political party is an institution formed by like-minded individuals with the aim of working towards defined political goals and objectives. The major goal of all political parties is usually capturing power and forming a government. It can thus be said that any political party that is not in government is essentially a 'government in waiting'.

Political parties have various roles/functions that they play in any political system:

1. They are effective 'governments in waiting'. This thus provides alternative leadership that people can opt for.
2. They conduct checks and balances against sitting governments.
3. They provide an opportunity for people to vie for political parties. Unless one is an independent candidate, one needs to be nominated/sponsored by a political party.
4. They are agents for social action i.e. they help raise a voice on social issues like health, security, education, governance, etc.

5. They organize and mobilize people politically.
6. They provide civic education to their members.
7. They are agents in the democratization process.
8. They propose alternative policies that can be used for better governance and running of the affairs of a state.
9. They provide the electorate with the element of choice in their electoral preferences while voting.

### **1.1.1. Challenges Facing Political Parties and Political Institutions**

The following are the key challenges facing political institutions (including political parties):

#### **1) Leadership crisis/Wrangles**

Often times they are challenged in their leadership ranging from lack of good and effective leadership, visionary leadership, poor succession planning and even having leadership centered around a single individual. This is particularly so within the context of developing countries around the world.

## **2) Financing challenges**

Political institutions mainly rely on membership fees or donations from members or supporters of the political cause in question. This often times may be limited and, in most cases, hard to come by putting them in dire financial strain. In most states nowadays, laws are being pushed for or put in place for state funding of key political institutions including political parties. This reality has also been realized in Kenya.

### **3) Lack of a guiding ideology**

Most political parties especially in the developing operate in an ad hoc manner often times without a guiding party ideology. In such contexts, a party is simply a 'vehicle' to get you to a destination. In this regard, many people operate parties but are not faithful to what parties entail. Many parties do have a guiding ideology on paper in their manifestos but this is not practiced in day-to-day party affairs and activities.

#### **4) Harassment, intimidation, and arbitrary arrest of leaders**

In most nations especially developing nations party leaders and members in the opposition usually suffer a lot of harassment, disruption of their rallies, banning of their parties, detention without trial, and at times even death. For instance, Dr. Kiza Besigye a Ugandan opposition leader has borne the brunt of such harassment over the years.

## **5) Lack of internal democracy in their management/Running**

There are political parties that claim to be democratic but there is a severe deficiency of democratic values in how they are run. In most of them expressing a different opinion from the party position or expressing a different view from or being critical of the party leader amounts to disciplinary measures under the guise of one is working in cohorts with the government of the day and other 'party enemies.



## **6) Poor/limited membership**

Most political parties for instance in the developing world, find themselves having more supporters than members. This seriously affects them since the chunk of party funding comes from membership registration. This puts them in serious financial difficulties. In Kenya for instance, political parties also rarely carry out membership drives and therefore cannot attract members.

## **7) Mismanagement**

In most parties, there is great ineptitude on the part of party leaders and managers which does not give a good name for the parties. Contrasted to the experiences of parties in developed countries, this seriously diminishes the stature of a political party.

## **8) Weak linkage with other institutions (both political and non-political).**

Political parties, as part of working towards their objectives, must cultivate relationships with other individuals working around the same goals to further their interests. This is an area that has been seriously lacking. These include linkages with academia, civil society, the private sector, professional organizations, and trade unions among others.

## **9) Poor public participation in their affairs.**

Most parties are only active during the campaign and the electioneering period after which they go dormant. This thus makes the general public unaware of what they are up to the other times.

## **10) Weak governance and institutional structures and systems.**

Political parties, for their effective operation need to have sound institutional capacities as well as governance structures. If they are to really contend that they are governments in waiting, this must be shown in how they run their affairs. This as pointed out is usually lacking in most parties.

## **11) Multiple proliferation of political institutions**

At times too many of them are formed and they tend to do the same thing leading to over-duplication of roles. Despite the reality that the world is in a multi-party democracy, too many parties do more harm than good. Ideally, two or three large parties would a political system more service than having tens of them. In most nations, the number of active parties is usually less than the total number registered.

## **1.2. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR**

Man is a 'political animal' and everything about him/her is political nature. Politics influences/informs virtually every aspect of life. It is therefore not uncommon to see individuals in society exhibiting political behavior either in support of or opposition to certain political issues. Political behavior is guided by the criterion of the political positions people take. The desire to undertake political activism, the desire to join a political party and even the desire to vie for a political position is all founded on the desires people have about politics.

### **1.2.1. Individuals and their Roles in the Political Process**

Individuals are key players in the political process of any state and this role includes but is not limited to the following:

1. Joining political causes that lead them to specific political parties, movements, or institutions.
2. Offering themselves for candidature in elective posts.
3. Participating in the voting process.
4. Participating in other civic duties in their state.
5. Joining in protests or demonstrations for or against certain things.
6. Expressing their opinions/views concerning the affairs of the state through various mediums and channels.
7. Identifying with their state and expressing their devotion and allegiance.