

Political parties in papua new guinea



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The Context of Political Parties in PNG

A political party is defined as an organized group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions, that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office. Papua New Guinea has a multi party system. The government of the day is usually described by a stiff competition between several parties to create a factionalized coalition government. The formation of national governments, since independence in 1975, has followed a similar trend, with political parties competing for a better chance to form the next coalition government. Multi-party competition reduces the possibility of other political systems being introduced and jeopardizing our adopted democratic Westminster system of government.

This system tends to promote coalition governments, as no single party is large enough to form government by itself. Since the formation of the first indigenous government in 1975, no government has served out a full five year term, until 2002 when the Somare led a coalition where he was able to stay in power for a full term. PNG has a highly fragmented, factionalized, unstable and undisciplined party system. This becomes obvious following elections or votes of no confidence, when political parties lobby each other to form the next government. The main feature of party competition during this period is party hopping by disloyal and undisciplined members of Parliament.

However, the Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates (OLIPPAC) was introduced to regulate the behavior of political parties and candidates, and prevent this. Before the introduction of the OLIPPAC, the party system in PNG was comparatively weak, in performance and

sustainability. This trend continues, despite the introduction of the OILPPAC because of the political behavior of members, and lack of party discipline. There are four main factors besides others in our party system including; Political parties In PNG are the creation of the (Indigenous) political elites, who have been able to preserve the consensus on the plural nature of society, and served as the capitalist path to economic growth and the conciliation of divergent interests, as the mechanisms of conflict resolution.

Read aboutThe emphasis on consensus has therefore reduced differences between parties to marginal issues, and prevented the appearance of ideological cleavages. Consensus politics has relied on the heavy use of patronage with a non-zero sum approach; i. e.

, the outcomes of the political process have played to the advantage of all actors, including the voters. A coalition government In PNG ensures that voters' mandates are treated as political assignments that give MPs focus and responsibility in affording equal representation. Parties in both the Government and the Opposition compete with each other when pursuing their policy platforms on which their candidates have been elected. Such competition usually ensures that no single interest group dominates.

This impartial representation would make the Government more accountable and stable. Another major strength within our party system and elsewhere in democratic states exists on the basis of government stability and democracy. The multi-party system in PNG has ensured that several coalition parties form the Government, which has reduced the likelihood of other political systems being introduced (especially a one party system). If ever a

single party governed PNG, it could be fatal to our democratic principles. Autocratic or tyrannical rule would be damaging to the interests of the people and sovereignty of PNG as a state, and must be avoided at all costs.

The most important strength of our multi-party system is that it creates internal checks and balances within the Government and the Opposition. Political parties act as checks and balances, and present critical debate (in parliamentary secessions), reunion and compromise, and also try to amend various government decisions. The Opposition as considerable input in that regard when it comes to criticizing government decision. The weakness of the party system includes; the stagnation of the party system in PNG is the result of historical factors as well as the inability of the parties to create unity and mobilize political power. The lack of good fundamental issues around which political parties can congregate to enable them to evolve and develop.

This is because most political parties are primarily interested in political power, rather than the representation of public interest. It has been suggested that political arties have not mobilized the people, but rather given unity to the political elite and provided mechanisms through which that elite gains access to, manipulates, and retains political power. The short period of party activity in the limited participating context of pre-independence politics, and the absence of a broad-based nationalist movement have hindered the development of a strong party system. There are also colonial factors which remain persistent. It has been suggested that the colonial administration did little to encourage the formulation and development of political arties in the 1960s and 1970s. The main presuppositions that attest to these traditional political sentiments are; weak

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nationalist feelings because of dominant society alignment and the so-called social safety net Wantok system/ wantokism’.

The nation lacks a sufficiently large and independent indigenous middle class to sustain nationalism. Traditional, cultural, and social cleavages play a dominant role in PNG, where there is a complex rural polity, cultural diversity, and lack of ability of like-minded Papua New Guineans (political leaders) to form coalition parties that will raise national consciousness and political awareness. These might be some of the explanations that gave rise to party weakness, unstructured ideologies and the lack of organizational and institutional goals. Thus, the uneven nature of participating democracy together with inconsistent party policies has negative effects on the OLIPPAC.