

# Structural functionalism theory

Society



In any political system are structures that have different functions to ensure an effective and smooth running of things in that particular political system. This is why this essay will discuss the problems faced by opposition political parties in Zambia using the structural functionalist theory. First it will explain what structural functionalism is, then it will define structures, functions, a political party and an opposition party then before giving the conclusion it will discuss the problems faced by opposition parties in Zambia.

Johari (2011) defines structural functionalism as a means of explaining what political structures perform what basic functions in a political system, it is a tool of investigation. Macions and Gerber (2010: 14) states “ this approach looks at society through a macro-level orientation, which is a broad focus on the social structures that shape society as a whole and by this society evolves like organisms”. According to Johari (2011: 73) “ functions deal with the consequences involving objectives as well as processes of the patterns of action, Structures refer to those arrangements within the system which perform the functions.

For example the police are a structure within the political system that have a function of maintaining peace and order. “ In the concept of functions, three basic questions are involved- what basic functions are discharged in any given system, by what instruments those functions are performed and under what conditions the performance of these functions are done”,(Ibid). Merton (1957: 51) says “ functions are those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or re-adjustment of a given system and dysfunctions those observed consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system”.

A political party is a body of men united for promoting the national interests on some particular principles in which they are all agreed. It is also defined as a group of men professing the same political doctrine. These parties perform a lot of functions. Political parties unite, simplify and stabilise the political process. They seek to widen the interests they represent and harmonise interests with each other. They provide a link between the government and the people. Easton (1965) adds on “ political parties seek to educate, instruct and activate the electorate”.

That is they perform the job of political mobilisation, secularisation and recruitment. Usually in a political system the government is under the control of a political party. If a political party does not have control of the government but have seats in the parliament then it is an opposition party which means it opposes the government. An opposition party carries with it all the functions of a political party. Opposition parties are there to check the smooth running of government, in other words they offer checks and balances to the government.

In Zambia’s political system are different structures that perform different functions that affect the opposition parties. Among these is the legislature that comprises of the president, cabinet ministers and members of parliament also known as the national assembly. Its function is to make laws that benefit the society as a whole. When a bill is read in the national assembly it has to be supported by the majority of the house in order for it to become a law. Mainly the opposition reject bills that they find not suitable for the society.

But of late in Zambia the president has appointed opposition members of parliament to serve as cabinet ministers in government which leads to some of them being expelled from their respective political parties. This affects the opposition because “ a party is supposed to form a government based on its own ideology”, (Ibid), therefore when the opposition members of parliament are brought into government they need to adopt and adapt to the ruling party’s ideology hence disadvantaging the opposition when it comes to decision making in the national assembly.

The Media is also another structure involved with the dissemination of information to the society. According to Almond and Powell (1966) a political party needs to communicate with the electorate. Every time opposition parties receive coverage in an article, have their face on television or their voice on radio, they assume that they increase their chances among potential voters. In Zambia however instead of the media being one of the means of popularity exposure for opposition parties, it tends not to give them enough time because of the media being influenced by government.

Zambian Economist (accessed on 17. 12. 13) states “ if the press was free we would for example expect high degree of information compared to a government controlled media”. Hence this becomes a problem for the opposition. The Judiciary has a function of enforcing the law and making sure the rule of law is observed. The Zambia Reports (accessed on 9. 12. 13) states “ UPND chairperson for Tourism and Culture Ephraim Belemus said Acting Chief Justice Chibesakunda was compromised and her continued stay at the helm of the Judiciary had proved costly to the justice system of the country”.

From this quotation we can tell that in Zambia the opposition political parties have been shut from making meaningful contribution to the nation. This absence of effective participation in the political process is a very serious limitation that Zambian opposition parties face. The executive is in charge of implementing the law and is headed by the president. When a law is made in parliament it has to be ratified by the chief executive officer who happens to be the president.

In some cases and in a democratic nation per say the president ratifies laws that are not in favour of the opposition for example in Zambia as the Electoral Institution for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (accessed on 10. 12. 13) reports “ in May 1996 the Zambian constitution was amended, a presidential candidate needs to be Zambian by birth” this disadvantaged the opposition parties present then like UNIP and its president Dr Kenneth Kaunda is not Zambian by birth.

Having discussed the problems of these structural functions on the opposition political parties, it is important that we also discuss how these problems can be improved. To start with the legislature, being a law effecting body Sisson and Snowis (1975) states “ the involvement of the legislature in the making of the law must be considered their central and most fundamental function”. In this case both the opposition and the ruling parties need to participate effectively because the end results should not only benefit a particular party but the society as a whole.

“ Modern or modernising societies assume that the legislative institutions ought to serve as auxiliaries in the mobilisation of public support for policies”, (Ibid), as such members of parliament (MP’s) including opposition

MPs should be funded to develop their constituencies. The media should be free from any form of corruption or any limitation, government if anything should invest in the media so as to allow it disseminate quality information to the nation at large. Unlike The Zambian situation were the Zambian Economist (accessed on 17. 12. 13) on March 17, 2013 referred to the Zambian media as a “ corrupt media”, the media should be

bias free, it should also give the opposition parties just as much attention as it gives the ruling party to allow the opposition share their views about government proceedings and its policies to allow them penetrate to all parts of the nation. The media plays a big function in the popularisation of the parties that wish to form a government in the future. For example the Post Newspaper is seen to have played a big role in the coming into power of the Ruling Patriotic Front (PF) because it made the party popular to the nation through its publications when the PF was in opposition.

The Judiciary is a mechanism for the resolution of disputes and Zambia being a democratic country the judiciary should be able to provide the opposition with legal support. Under the separation of powers, the judiciary does not make laws it's the work of the legislature neither does it implement the law which is the work of the Executive rather it interprets the law and applies it to the facts of each case. According to Garner (1952) “ justice means punishment to the wrong doer”. The major task of the judiciary is to ensure equal justice under the law.

Ball (1971) states “ The judges may be nominated by the head of state”, this does not mean the judges work for the head of state or the president they work to ensure that there is fair justice within the society. “ The decision of

the courts contribute the element of ‘ legitimacy’ to the outputs of the government. Thus it becomes essential that the behaviour of the courts must not be obstructive or destructive so that the smooth running of the organisation becomes a problem”, (Ibid). Therefore the judiciary needs to be as independent as possible, this would allow free participation of the opposition in the political process.

The Executive as its very name indicates, the first and foremost function of the executive is to run the administration of the country. In accordance with Johari (2011) the maintenance of internal peace and order should be the principle function for which the government should be established. For this purpose the executive keeps the police force that acts under its command, it should maintain defence forces to serve the country against external aggressions. The executive’s concern should be to formulate national policies for domestic as well external purposes.

All these functions of the Executive should benefit the society as well as opposition political parties, for example since the police force is under its command the opposition should be provided with the police service when they go to hold their rallies and campaigns. In conclusion, opposition parties in Zambia are faced with many structural functional problems some of which have been named in the discussion above, members of the opposition political parties are being lost to the ruling party to benefit their desire of having the overall decision making, and legislative work is purely dominated by the ruling party.

The media is a very important tool of investigation in the political process in that it provides the society of the happenings around if it is restricted to <https://assignbuster.com/structural-functionlism-theory/>

publish certain information by the government, society will have no means of knowing the wrongs of government making it difficult for opposition parties to provide checks and balances. The judiciary is heavily monitored by the ruling party giving no freedom to opposition parties to effectively participate in the political process. The Executive is also biased in the implementation of the law.