

Original Research Article

The Appropriateness or **Inadequacy** of the Multi-Party System in Burundian Politics

Abstract

Today's Burundi politics is based on a multi-party system as a way of implementing democracy. This system allows the existence of various political parties which take part in elections and have equal possibilities of running government offices either **as single parties** or in coalition. In Burundi, as well as in many other African countries, that multi-party system started during the colonisation period in the 1950's. However soon after independence in the 1960's, this political system collapsed in favour of single-party systems characterised by authoritarian military political systems except in Botswana, Mauritius island and Senegal. This research has been conducted with the purpose of knowing whether the multi-party system fits the Burundian politics or not. In total, it has been possible to gather responses from 600 informants from Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, from various Burundi geographical regions of origin, with the age of 18 years or more, from all genders, and from different educational backgrounds. The main research instrument which has been used for collecting data was interview. Among all those respondents, 450 were males, whereas 150 were females. The findings **of** this investigation have revealed that in Burundi males prefer a multi-party system over a single-party one at the rate of 93.3%, while females support a single-party system at the rate of 100%.

Key words : Multi-party system, democracy, elections, Burundian politics, single-party system

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Specifying the problem

Politics is firstly a set of actions that leaders or other social actors undertake so as to take decisions, to influence the process of decision taking or to hold accountability positions. The multi-party system is a political system which is based on the existence of various political parties in the country. These political parties allow the citizens of a state to take part in decision making. As Charles Tilly (2007:15) put it " No democracy can work if the state lacks the capacity to supervise democratic decision making and put its results into practice". It is a new system in Africa, which is one of the novelties brought by colonisation. In many African countries, including Burundi, it has been difficult to set it up because the monarchical system which was prevailing there before colonisation was based on the principle of " One King, one people". According to John Fage (2013 : 38), in monarchical Africa, " The king, if not necessarily God himself, was thought to descend from God. That is why he was separated from ordinary men by a wealth of ritual. He was rarely seen in public, commonly gave audience from behind some sort of screen, communicated essentially through spokesmen, and was not to be seen performing such mundane functions as eating and drinking. "The subjects were so much united around their king that they could not imagine a situation in which they should be compelled to be divided owing to what is now called " Political parties ". Ziegler J showed that with colonisation the Burundian kingdom lost its ordinary structures because of the extra-African influence. When the multi-party system began, it was as if this socio-political belief was being destroyed, and a new way of thinking, behaving and acting, which was strange to the African people started.

This is true inasmuch as each leader of a political party behaves as if he were a king of a portion of the population called " His supporters, or Members of his political party". But the mental change is a long process which requires much time so that it may effectively take place. The purpose of this research paper is to show if the multi-party system is suitable in Burundi or not. In order to reach this purpose, a research question has been put in this way : Is multi-party system appropriate in Burundi or not ? Before answering this question, we deal first with the historical background of the multi-party system in Africa in general, and in Burundi in particular, paying much attention to the situation of this country before independence and after its independence. This has been followed by Method, Results and Discussion. As a starting point, let us talk about the beginning of the multi-party system in Africa.

1.2. The beginning of the multi-party system in Africa

At the end of the 1950's, Africa underwent a wave of the claim for independence, including Burundi. It was in that context that political parties were created by the indigenous elites. These parties have been in rivalry and competition so as to replace

the colonial power. However, in Burundi, these political parties disappeared soon after independence and even before in some cases. This phenomenon of the disappearance of political parties was not a peculiarity for Burundi only. According to Carbone, G.M. (2007:1-2), it is what was happening on the whole African continent:

The multi-party system proved to be badly set up on the continent : Pluralism was quickly abandoned. In different ways, the majority of African countries opted for replacing it with single-party led States and by military regimes. Within a period of few years, authoritarian governments practically dominated on the whole continent. The multi-party based politics remained only in Botswana, in Gambia and in the Mauritius island, while it was set up in Senegal and in Zimbabwe during the 1970's and 1980's.

The fragility of the multi-party system did not delay in showing itself in Africa, including in Burundi. It was not easy for Africans to understand the concept of political parties, since it was very new to them. When the elites created a political party, they would give it a good name, but the ordinary citizens who joined it did not understand well its real political will. As SLOMCZYNSKI, Kazimierz and SHABAD, Goldie (2012:898) said, "More so than many other political institutions, political parties are held in considerable disrepute. That is due in large part to widespread perceptions that both party politicians and parties as organizations are corrupt". Under such circumstances, it becomes easy for the members to leave it whenever they like.

The fight for power is normally a daily one. A political party does not start today for disappearing tomorrow. This is due to the fact that each political party should be based on a sustainable and strong ideology which is likely to cause the leaders of that party to reach the fulfilment of their vision for the sake of the nation and its citizens.

An ideology which is based on a precarious and selfish vision cannot last. By creating political parties during the colonial power, some Burundi politicians took into account only the circumstances of that period, without thinking about possible geopolitical changes which could occur step by step in the future. This resulted in violence especially after independence as Katrin Wittig (2016) put it in these words, "Throughout Burundi's post-colonial history, periods of regime change, transition, and elections have been volatile".

This violence was not necessarily founded on ethnicity. According to Stef Vandeginste (2007), "After having been dominated by an ethnicity-based speech for many years, oppositions and misunderstandings within the Burundian political class took a form which was less shaped on the basis of ethnicity considerations". As for Simon Turner (2008) he wrote that "The recent ending of the conflict in Burundi has meant that the point of gravity of the political field has shifted back to the territory of the nation-state". A political party cannot be founded only on the ambition of its leaders to win elections : It should be ready to continue to exist even after its unexpected defeat during elections. It is high time we dealt with Burundi political parties before independence.

1.3. Burundi political parties before independence

The attempts to set up democracy based on the multi-party system began before the independence of Burundi which took place on July 1, 1962. Burundian elites had expressed early their wish to reach ideal democracy so that they could be sovereign, but this could not be achieved without obstacles.

According to Michels, R. (1971:297), "Ordinary citizens will be sovereign only in an abstract way. The question which is asked is not that of knowing how people can set up an ideal democracy. The question which should be put is rather that of knowing to which extent democracy is wished and possible at a given moment". Political parties were wished in Burundi even before independence, but the political instability which was prevailing at that time was not a good opportunity for them to be strong and sustainable, whereas, as Gazibo, M. (2006:8) put it, they remain like a norm: "In fact, political parties are classical actors of liberal democracy which has been like a norm in Africa- despite its incapacity to keep its promises." That is why there was the will to create political parties in Burundi before independence.

The first political parties to have been created in Burundi had the ambition of conquering the power as this is the case for all the political parties. However the following facts must be specified :

- From January to March 1960, there was the creation of national political parties which had members in the whole country. Those were for instance PP (People's Party of Emmanuel Nigane), PDC¹ (Parti Démocrate Chrétien = Christian Democrat Party of Joseph Birori), and PDR (Parti Démocrate Rural = Rural Democratic Party of Pierre Bigayimpunzi).

- From April to September 1960, there was the creation of small parties with a local influence (case of Mouvement Rural du Burundi = Rural Movement of Burundi based at Bururi only for example), or Union-based parties (Parti des Travailleurs du Burundi = The Party of Burundi Workers, Parti des Jeunes Travailleurs du Burundi = The Party of Burundi Young Workers, Rassemblement des Travailleurs du Burundi = Rally of Burundi Workers), or even ethnic group-based parties (Parti de l'émancipation populaire = Party of People's Emancipation, Union pour la Promotion Hutu = Union for Hutu Promotion).

Those parties took side concerning the appropriate time for Burundi independence, with the cooperation of Rwanda on the one hand, and with Belgium on the other, as well as concerning the maintaining of monarchy or not.

¹Approved on February 5, 1960, PDC had the purpose of setting up sincere, continuing and dynamic collaboration between all the members and of dealing with all political, social, moral, cultural and economic problems of Burundi. It also insisted on the democratisation of the institutions before reaching independence.

a. Supporting or rejecting the immediate independence

" While in Rwanda, the ideologies of the main political parties were based on ethnic groups², in Burundi the creation of the main political parties namely UPRONA and PDC were based on the rivalry between princes. The main cause of divergency between both parties concerned the question of independence. UPRONA was in favour of immediate independence, whereas PDC wanted it later. " ³

During that period of electoral competition, two groups of parties were in opposition : An alliance led by UPRONA and which comprised five other parties (Démocratie Nationale du Burundi= Burundi National Democracy, Parti des Jeunes Travailleurs du Burundi= The Party of Burundi Young Workers, Parti Conservateur= Conservative Party, La Voix du Peuple Murundi= The Voice of the Burundian People, and Abanyamajambere b'i Burundi⁴). Those parties were against subjective writings, which had a bad intention against their opponents whom they were taking as P.N.P.N (Partis des Nègres Payés pour Nuire= Parties of Niggers paid for harming)⁵ and agreed that independence had to be given at once.

-Another point of view contrary to the preceding one was expressed by parties united within the Common, Popular and Democrat Front led by PDC (Parti Démocrate Chrétien= Christian Democrat Party). For it, to give Burundians independence would have been to lie them, it would have been a luxury only. It needed first a democratic Burundian State based on christian principles of justice, equality and the respect of the human being. For it the independence of Burundi had not to be forced at once.

b. Relationships with Rwanda

Fearing the infection of Burundi from its neighbour of the north concerning the relationships between the two ethnic groups of those countries (Namely the Hutus and the Tutsis), Burundian political leaders seemed to be unanimous : They preferred the separation between those two countries. However, one must note the existence of an alliance named "Ijwi ry'amajambere y'abasanze" (The voice of the progress of ordinary people). For that alliance, Rwanda which had already succeeded in its socio-political revolution could serve as a model. Those political parties were the following : MPB (Mouvement Progressiste du Burundi = Burundi Progressist Movement), PP (Le Parti du Peuple= People's Party), PEP (Le Parti de l'Emancipation Populaire= The Party of Popular Emancipation), and VPM (La Voix du Peuple Murundi= The Voice of Burundian People). They were introducing themselves as defenders of ordinary people who were for them the Hutu people, and were taking as a scandal the great confusion brought by UPRONA and PDC which were being taken as the parties of people with favours.

² Here one can remind the opposition between MDR PARMEHUTU and UNAR in Rwanda

³ <https://www.yaga-burundi.com/2020/partis-politiques-histoire-remonte-loin/> Visited on Thursday July 30, 2020 at 7 : 50

⁴ Abanyamajambere b'i Burundi: Those who Struggle for Progress in Burundi

⁵ An expression from Congo to mean indigenous people who collaborate with the coloniser

c. Relationships with Belgium

Almost all the Burundi political parties of that period seemed to require a certain cooperation with Belgium including those which were supporting immediate independence. Some parties like the Party of Popular Emancipation and Burundi National Union preferred to remain in close collaboration with Belgium⁶ because "This country may know the Burundi socio-economic problems better than anyone else. "

d. The maintaining of monarchy

Despite divergences which were sometimes shown, all the political parties seemed to be in favour of the maintaining of monarchy. In that context of the search for freedom and democracy, the monarchy to be adopted had to be guided by very clear rules and modalities, that is a constitutional monarchy. The point of view of King Mwambutsa Bangiricenge (who ruled from 1915 to 1966) may have influenced such a situation. On February 8, 1960, after the approval of UPRONA, PP and PDC political parties, he delivered a speech to the nation in which one can read what follows:⁷

I inform all Burundians that as I am the King of all, I am a member of no political party, and I intend to remain above all political parties. I am inwardly with all Burundians who are loyal, attached and devoted to their country and to their King. No party has the right to claim that it is exclusively mine, or to reject in my name the existence of any other party whose purpose is the search for the benefit of Burundi⁸.

Taking into account the King's words, one can see that the creation of those competing political alliances was not beneficial to all Burundians. Each political group would formulate its arguments only for explaining its creation and its existence. Let us now shift to Methodology section.

2.METHODOLOGY

⁶ The Kingdom of Burundi, which was probably founded in the XVIIth century, became one of the components of German East Africa in 1890. After World War I (July 28, 1914- November 11, 1918), it becomes the Belgian colonial empire, within the Ruanda-Urundi province, which was also integrated in Belgian Congo in 1925.

<https://www.google.com/search?> Visited on Wednesday August 5, 2020 at 11 o'clock

⁷ This web site was visited on Monday July 27, 2020 at 14 o'clock. See <http://royaume-du-burundi.e-monsite.com/pages/images-1/mwambutsa-bangiricenge.html>

Born in 1912, Mwambutsa became King when he was still very young. While waiting for the young King to be mature, the power was in the hands of the Queen-Mother Ririkumutima and princes Ntarugera, Nduwumwe and Karabona. <http://burundi-information.net/anniversaire-investiture-mwambutsa-bangiricenge-rubangisha.html> Visited on Monday July 27, 2020

⁸ Rudipresse, n°158 of February 13, 1960

For this research paper, interview has been used as the main instrument in conducting the investigation. As a whole, six hundred people have responded to the researcher's appeal to reply. These interviewees were from various regions of Burundi, and from the two main ethnic groups, namely the Hutus and the Tutsis, without taking into account their educational backgrounds. The members of the Twa ethnic group were not part of this inquiry for technical issues, and because they represent a very low proportion of the whole Burundian population (only 1%), their absence in this research does not hamper the obtained results. According to Bingham, Walter V., and Bruce Victor Moore(1931),

The interview is a conversation with a purpose. Divergence among interviewers is frequent. Unreliability may be due to the interviewer, the interviewee or their relation. The interview should be planned and should start with some interest of the interviewee. /.../ General studies of the interview reveal difficulties due to the halo effect, length of acquaintance, stereotyped notions as to the appearance of persons possessing certain traits; studies of reliability and validity are desirable. The interview provides information about attitudes rather than external facts. It has emotional limitations such as modesty, self-interest, and tendency to minimize one's weaknesses.

The researcher has conducted this interview with the purpose of knowing what the majority of Burundians think about a multi-party political system and about a single-party system. In this interview, 450 were males, while 150 were females. Only respondents aged 18 and more were interviewed because those below that age are not allowed to take part in political matters in Burundi. For ethical considerations, their identities have not been revealed here, except their genders as they consented during the investigation. Talking about interview, Fontana and Frey (2000) say what follows,

Interviewing can be used for marketing research, political opinion polling, therapeutic reasons, or academic analysis. It can be used for the purpose of measurement or its scope can be the understanding of an individual or a group perspective. An interview can be a one-time, brief event-say, 5 minutes over the telephone-or it can take place over multiple, lengthy sessions, at times spanning days, as in life history interviewing.

This interview was carried out in the framework of political opinion polling in Burundi. It took place over multiple, lengthy sessions when the researcher was off duty, as far as his daily occupations are concerned.

Besides interview, documentary research has been resorted to in preparing this paper, notably via Google and Google Scholar. These have been of paramount importance especially in writing the Background section of this research. With the main method (Interview), the following results have been obtained.

3.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

After the phase of data collecting for this research, the following results have been obtained : All the 150 females who accepted to give their opinions declared that they are in favour of a multi-party system in the Burundian politics, that is 100%. On a total of 450 males who took part in this investigation, 420 said that they are in favour of the multi-party system in Burundian politics, that is 93.3%, whereas 30 of them only declared that they need a single-party system, that is 6.7%. Among those 420 who support the multi-party system, 60 assert that they would like a system based on two political parties only, that is 14.3%, whereas 30 of them put that they would like less than five political parties, that is 7.1%. By using tables, this reality can be illustrated as follows :

Table 1 : The rate of females and males who are in favour of the multiparty system in Burundi :

Gender	Rate in %
Females	100
Males	93.3

Table 2 : The rate of males who are in favour of two political parties or less than five of them in Burundi :

Gender and attitude	Rate in %
Males in favour of two	14.3
Males in favour of less than five	7.1

Table 3 : The rate of females and males who are in favour of a single-party system in Burundi

Gender	Rate in %
Females	0

Males	6.7
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3.2. Discussion

Political parties are necessary in the democratic process. At some time, the existence of political parties became like a demand so that the population may have numerous opportunities of expressing its opinions so as to contribute in the sustainable development of Burundi without resorting to violence. Without democracy, it is difficult for the citizens to have a link with the ruling political institutions. That is what can be found in the Forum for democracy, Session 2006 (p.19)⁹ in the following words :

Political parties play an essential role in any democratic process. To some extent, they are the mediators between the population and political institutions. Without parties, it is impossible to express clearly the benefits of various social categories: The system of parties favours debates on questions which are beneficial to the whole society.

Burundi is a young democracy. As Professor Jean-Michel DE WAELE et al., (2002 :10) put it, "The study of the birth and the strengthening of young democracies allows the researchers to analyse the place of parties in the process of the strengthening of a democratic system". After the independence of Burundi on July 1, 1962, the multi-party system was resumed in 1992. It came back as a new political reality, since the ordinary citizens were already used to the single-party system and its negative impacts on their daily lives. Only the elites could notice those impacts of the absence of the multi-party system such as nepotism and corruption.

In Burundi, six political parties were approved in 1992, namely PRP, RPB, PP, ANADDE, RADDES and PL. Four others were registered in 1993, that is PSD, PIT, ABASSA and MSP-Inkinzo. Another, namely PARENA, was approved in 1994. Another one, that is VERT-Intwari ; was registered in 1996. Eight Burundi political parties, namely SANGWE-PADER, ALIDE, UPD, NADDEBU, PAJUDE, MRC-Rurenzangemero, SONOVI and RUSANGI were approved in 2002. Five parties were registered in 2004, namely PACONA; PPDRR-Abavandimwe, PARIBU-Intahemana, ABAHUZA, and PML-Abanyamwete. Nine parties were approved in 2005, that is CNDD-FDD, KAZE-FDD, FNL-Icanzo, FROLINA-Abanyamuryango, PMP-Abagenderabanga, CNDD, PALIPE-Agakiza, PIEBU-Abanyeshaka, and FEDES-

⁹Forum for the future of democracy Session 2006, The role of political parties in democracy building. Moscow, Centre of World Trade, 18-19 October 2006, p.19. Opening speech of Serguei Lavrov, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the European Council, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

Sangira. In 2008, three political parties were registered in Burundi, namely P.T.D-Twunge urunani; Sahwanya-FRODEBU Nyakuri-Iragi rya Ndadaye, and ADR-Urunani rw'Imvugakuri. In 2009, four political parties were approved, namely RADEBU, CDP, FNL and MSD. In 2019, another political party was registered in the ministry of home affairs which was in charge of political parties in Burundi, namely CNL.

The multiparty-system returned in Burundi after the speech of the French President, François Mitterand on June 20, 1990 at La Baule, urging African leaders to adopt political systems based on the plurality of parties, and after which many African countries gave their consent. Thus, the Burundi today's political system is based on many parties. Of all those parties, three only prove to be active on the political ground if we consider the intensity of the electoral campaign and the outcome of the elections which were held in Burundi in 2020. Those three political parties are CNDD-FDD, CNL and UPRONA. In this investigation, it has been shown that the majority of Burundians are in favour of a multi-party political system, whereas very few of them support a single-party one. But one can ask oneself the following question : What are the advantages of a multi-party system, and what are the disadvantages of a single-party one in Burundi ? What follows is the summary of what our informants think about this in general.

In democracy, one country can choose a single-party system, a two-party system, or a multi-party system. In the world politics in general, a multi-party system is preferred over the two other ones. In Burundi, as it has been shown in **Table 1** of this paper, a large majority of people needs a multi-party system. Reasons are numerous: In a multi-party system,

- Political leaders of various parties express freely their political opinions based on the ideologies of their parties, so as to give their contribution in the sustainable development of the nation ;

- There are free and fair elections which allow each citizen aged 18 or more to vote for the political party of his choice without being compelled to do so ;

- There is the respect of human rights in all their aspects through the taking part of the citizens in all the sectors of the life of the nation, and the free participation in various associations and cooperatives ;

- We find good governance and freedom of speech which create a good environment of business doing, home and foreign investment, thus contributing in the sustainable development of the country ;

- The awareness of the population is raised by various political and social partners about climate change and its effects on biodiversity ;

- The ruling party is indirectly corrected by its opponents when they mention its misdeeds in their political rallies, thus helping it to lead the government better than before.

Although the multi-party system is more favoured in Burundi than the single-party one, it has been indicated in this research that 14.3% of men who responded to this investigation are in favour of two political parties only, whereas 7.1% of them support less than five political parties (**Table 2**).

Throughout this research, it has been obvious that the large majority of Burundians does not support a single-party system (**Table 3**) for the following reasons: In a single-party system,

- The country is governed on the basis of the opinions of one political party only;

- There are no free and fair elections which may allow each citizen aged 18 or more to vote for the political party of his choice: You vote for the candidate provided by the ruling party and there is no more possible discussion;

- Human rights are violated, including the right to life as the ruling party wishes;

- There is the absence of good governance and freedom of speech. This causes the lack of a good environment for business doing, and there is neither home nor foreign investment, which may foster the sustainable development of the country;

- There is no diversity in opinions from different political and social partners concerning the raising of the awareness of the population about the global warming and its effects on biodiversity;

- There is no way of correcting the mistakes of the ruling party by its opponents because they have no opportunity of showing that they exist. So, the ruling party does everything in its own way.

In this research, some respondents assert that Burundi is a so small country that it deserves only two political parties. They assert that many of the parties exist by names only and play no obvious role in the leading of the nation.

A few number of the informants for this research said that they prefer many political parties, but that their number should not exceed five, without specifying how many they do exactly need. They told the researcher that a lot of Burundi political parties were created in the framework of Arusha peace talks for peace and reconciliation in Burundi. At that time being a leader of a political party was a source of various social, economic and political personal benefits, but this situation has already changed today.

4. CONCLUSION

The existence of many parties in a country is a major parameter for having free and fair elections in choosing the national leaders. According to Kevin Dano et al.(2022), "In theory, free and fair elections can improve the selection of politicians and incentivize them to exert effort. In practice, incumbency advantage and coordination issues may lead to the (re)election of bad politicians".

There have been two attempts of setting up the political multi-party system in Burundi : One before independence, and another one after independence in 1992. The single-party system proved not to be effective and Burundi is now back in the multi-party system. The majority of Burundians are now so much in favour of the multi-party system that it is almost impossible to change their minds. This research paper whose purpose was to show if the multi-party system is suitable for Burundi has proved that Burundians are proud of the coming of the multi-party system in their country.

This paper has been subdivided in four sections, namely Introduction, Methodology, Results and Discussion, with this Conclusion at its end. In Introduction, the author has put Specifying the problem, The beginning of the multi-party system in Africa, and Burundi political parties before independence. In the Methodology section, it has been question of mentioning the research instruments used for producing this paper, namely interview and documentary research. In the Results and Discussion section, the author has shown the proportion of females and males who are in favour of either the multi-party system or the single-party one in Burundi, those who are in favour of two parties, or those who support less than five political parties. He has also provided the reader with elements on the multi-party system in Burundi after independence, the advantages of a multi-party system, and the disadvantages of a single-party one, to end with this Conclusion. This is the end of this research paper.

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