Introduction to the study of Government

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Abstract: *What is Government in Political Science? What precisely does it cover? These are some of the questions that spring to the mind of thee student faced with a choice of study at the university or college in the social and humanistic sciences. Political Science is an unknown field to the first-year student who has had nothing to do with it at high school, and the first thing we have to do is to define and explain what the term 'government' covers.*

At first glance, the question seems a simple one, and one likely to give little trouble to anyone acquainted with the subject. Yet, the fact is that despite centuries of scientific investigation and inquiry into the nature of government, no satisfactory definition has yet been suggested. This journal article makes a contribution to define and explain the term 'government'.

Keywords: *Government, authoritative rules, parliamentary system, comprehensive authority and involuntary membership.*

I. Introduction

The Greek philosopher Aristotle, who lived some 2800 years ago, is responsible for the famous observation that "man is a political animal". What Aristotle meant by this is that man is a sociable being who can only grow in association with his fellows. This is also the meaning of Aristotle's statement that a man would have to be either a beast (or therefore le than human) or a god (and therefore superhuman) to live outside of society.

So it is that where men live together they live according to some kind of order – an order which is expressed in terms of values, rules and institutions. The values, rules, and institutions may differ from society to society and from one historical period to another, but the fact is that some kind of organisation is present in every society or human association.

And because men are rational and inquisitive beings, throughout history they have asked fundamental questions about the order under which they live.

What form should social organisation take?

Who should make the rules?

What limits should these rules impose on individuals?

What s the ideal form of social organisation?

Questions of this kind have taxed great and ordinary minds in all societies down the ages; and on reflection it will be realised that thee enduring questions of government and politics are at the bottom of political discussion also in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia etc.

This article also deals with government with reference to SADC countries also.

II. Government

2.1 What is government?

Definition The term 'government' signifies two things. It can refer to certain persons who govern a particular country, as in the statement – "Mr Mugabe's government is not expected to react to the SADC/AU decision

Or 'government' can refer to certain institutions and procedures in a society, as in the statement – 'Central government has expanded over the years at the cost of the provincial councils'.

Both meanings are included in the following definition of government suggested by **Ranney**: '**Government is a body of persons and institutions that make and enforce law for a particular society'** [Austin Ranney: 1966:21].

According to <u>S.B.M Marume</u> (2015:31-32), the term 'government' also has a clearly defined meaning: Government as physical manifestation refers to the policy-making college of elected (or appointed) political office- bearers to be found at all levels in public institutions. Consequently, the cabinet ministers, the provincial

government councils, and municipal management committees (wherever possible) will be responsible for the function of government that is, governing. The government function can be defined as process whereby all authoritative policy for a particular community is formulated (conceptualised), adopted, and implemented. Such an activity is concerned with three main particular aspects: (a) the formulation and (b) adoption of government policy, and (c) the implementation of such adopted public policy (-ies).

Government assumes different forms. There is monarchical government, democratic government, and authoritarian government – to mention some obvious types. Moreover, the role government plays varies from society to society. In some countries, for example, government plays only a small role in the economic life of the community, whereas in other countries government actually manages the economy; in some countries government is creative, whereas in others it is oppressive. The different forms government assumes, and the greatly varying roles it plays, are important aspects which we will examine presently.

Government is by no means the only kind of social organisation. There are clubs, associations, churches, political parties, trade unions, professional associations and a host of other organisations all of which impose upon their members certain obligations and rules in return for some form of benefit. How does government differ from these organisations?

2.2 The difference between government and other forms of associations

Ranney's short discussion of this aspect is very good. He mentions four important features of government which distinguish it from other social organisations in contemporary society.

2.2.1 Comprehensive authority and involuntary membership

The rules which most social organisations adopt are applicable generally only to their members. Moreover, membership of most social organisations lies in the discretion of the individual. In other words, membership is voluntary.

The rules of government, however, are intended to apply to all members of the society. Moreover, membership of the national society is involuntary: subject to the rules of citizenship one is born into it; membership does not involve any deliberate choice.

2.2.1 Authoritative rules

The rules of government carry an authority which is unmatched by any non – governmental organisation, and in the case of a conflict the rules of government generally prevail.

2.2.3 Monopoly of extreme sanctions

All social organisations (including government) experience the problem of recalcitrant members, and all organisations impose a penalty of some kind, the ultimate penalty being expulsion in the case of non – governmental organisations.

Government, however, can impose two penalties forbidden to non – governmental organisations, namely imprisonment and execution.

2.2.4 Overwhelming force

It sometimes happens that non – governmental organisations use physical force against members to compel their conformity with the rules of the organisation.

Almost invariably, however, the use of physical force in these circumstances is unlawful, whereas the use of force by government to compel compliance with its rules is generally legitimate. What is more, in comparison to non – governmental organisations, the amount of force available to government is overwhelming [Ranney 1966: 21 – 22].

2.3 Names of types of governments within SADC region

Country	Type of government
Angola Mozambique	Fused soviet – socialist non – parliamentary – presidential system
Botswana	Tolerant, non – parliamentary and republican democracy
Namibia Tanzania Zambia Malawi South Africa	Tolerant, non – parliamentary and republican resemblance of democracy
Zimbabwe	Socialist, non – parliamentary – republican fused type of constitutional presidential system
Lesotho Swaziland	Monarchical, non – parliamentary, autocratic fused type of government

All these are developing semi – capitalist prismatic societies.

2.4.1 Forms of government
2.4.2 Classification of forms of government
2.4.2.1 Two principles of Aristotle's classification
Aristotle is responsible for one of the first classifications or typologies of governmental systems. The two principles in Aristotle's classification are the number of rulers involved and the nature of the interest they promote:
a. Either rulers pursue the general good or
b. They selfishly seek their own advantage.
So for each good form of government – defined in terms of the number of rulers – there is a bad form.

Rulers rule in the interest of   **ALL**

                                                                THEMSELVES

		ALL	THEMSELVES
	ONE	Kingship (Monarchy)	Tyranny
The number of citizens	**FEW**	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Entitled to rule	**MANY**	Polity	Democracy

2.4.2.2 Important modern classification bases
Although modern typologies of government vary greatly and are more complex that Aristole's, it is not hard to find echoes of Aristotle in many of them.
The more important modern classifications are based on
1. The relationship between the main organs of government (the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary);
2. The relative degree of centralisation and decentralisation of authority in the society; and
3. The values and belief systems which define the relationship between the individual, associations (for example, churches, corporation, and trade unions, etc) and the state, and which infuse government policy.

2.4.3 The relationship between the executive and the legislature: presidential and parliamentary systems as well as others
The two types of government which students are probably most familiar with are the **presidential** and the **parliamentary**.

2.4.3.1 Presidential system
In the case of the presidential form the executive is elected separately of the legislature and holds office independently of support in the legislature. The United States of America is the best known example of the presidential system. Whereas members of the House of Representatives [435] are elected on a rotator basis every two years, and Senators [100] every six years, the President is elected by the whole nation for a four – year term and is eligible for re-election. Usually, therefore, a President has a maximum of eight years in office.
Although the independence of the judiciary from both executive and legislative control is a principle of Western constitutional democracy, the presidential form is premised on the desirability of a strict separation also between the executive and the legislative branches. In the case of the United State this is formulated in terms of the doctrine of separation of powers. The three powers or function of government are supposed to check and balance each other. This is the reason for the division of functions and separation of institutions at the central (or federal) government level, and the scattered elections if different constituencies which not infrequently result in there being a Republican in the White House and a Democratic majority in Congress or vice versa. Such a situation may provide a stiff test of a President's ability, but it does not make government unworkable.
Apart from the United States, government in the Philippine Republic, in Liberia; in all the Central and South American republics in all SADC member states is of the presidential republican type. France offers a variation on the presidential form, in that although the President is elected for a six – year term by popular vote and appoints the Premier and the rest of the cabinet, they are members of the legislature.
In South Africa, the president is elected by Parliament (House of Assembly and Senate sitting together in joint session) usually the leader of the majority party in parliament is elected as State President for 5 years. In Zimbabwe, the President is elected directly by the voters during the harmonised national elections, for 5 years according to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013. However, the State Presidents in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zambia are non – parliamentary presidents.

2.4.3.2 Parliamentary system

The other important type in terms of this classification is the parliamentary system. The essential feature of the parliamentary form of government is that the executive and legislative branches are fused. Whereas the presidential form expressly excludes the President and Cabinet from the legislature, in the parliamentary system executive officers are actually required to hold legislative office. Thus the Prime Minister and Cabinet are generally drawn from the majority party in the legislature, and their continuance in office, in contrast to presidential government, depends on their retaining the support of a majority in the legislature. Closely related to the executive – legislative fusion is the concept and practice of cabinet responsibility. The Cabinet functions as a cohesive entity, and what differences there may be between individual ministers are not supposed to be aired outside of Cabinet meetings. (In fact, to leak a Cabinet decision is a cardinal political sin). Ministers assume joint or collective responsibility for Cabinet decisions.

2.4.3.3 Monarchical system

In the SADC region most particularly in Lesotho and Swaziland, there is the King as head of State and Government and Commander in Chief of Defence forces.

2.4.3.4 Own distinctive parliamentary systems

The parliamentary form has is origin in Britain, and as a result of British colonialism has taken root in countries throughout the world, including the commonwealth countries. But apart from the British form of parliamentary government, several Western European countries have their own distinctive parliamentary systems. Government in Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries reflects the different histories and cultures of each of these societies. But in all of them executive and legislative functions are fused.

2.4.3.5 Systems within SADC region

It is fair to say that in the SADC region, there is no – clear-cut presidential or parliamentary system. There are varieties of combinations for example, Lesotho and Swaziland, there is a monarchical system, the King chooses the cabinet of ministers either from members of Parliament or entirely from outside parliament. In South Africa, the State President is elected by the electorate.

Both in South Africa and Zimbabwe the Presidents choose their Cabinet Ministers from either House of Assembly or the Senate. In the case of Zimbabwe, the President chooses his cabinet ministers from National Assembly and Senate plus five from outside Parliament. But the Cabinet Ministers are responsible both to the President and have a collective responsibility to Parliament which passes or can refuse to endorse governmental programmes.
There is an aspect of parliamentary system.

2.4.4 Other classifications of government

The point should be made that there are other classifications of governmental besides the threefold typology adopted in this unit.

For example, governments are classified according to the manner of selecting the chief of state. Government in which this official inherits his position are known as monarchies, whereas those in which this official is selected in any way other than heredity are known as republics.

Another common classification is according to the actual location of the ruling power. Aristotle's typology, referred to at the beginning of this unit, is largely based on this principle, and it has persisted in some form or the other down to modern times. Thus on the basis of spectrum – analysis, contemporary political scientists distinguish between democracies, near democracies, near dictatorships, or dictatorships. Dictatorships in turn may be broken down into monarchical dictatorships, republican dictatorships, and communist dictatorships [Austin Ranney: 1966:65].

2.4.5 The distribution of governmental authority: federal and unitary government

Within all countries there is a central or national government and then state, provincial, divisional, borough, county, municipal, regional or cantonal authorities. Depending on the way governmental authority is distributed between the central government and these authorities, and their relationship to each other, governmental systems are either federal or unitary.

2.4.5.1 Federal governmental systems

In a federation governmental authority is shared by the central (or federal) government and the provincial or state governments. This division of functions is precisely defined and can only be altered with the

agreement of all or most of the government concerned. The relationship between them is usually embodied in a 'written constitution'. Lord Dicey defined the essential features of federalism as

1. The supremacy of the constitution,
2. A distribution among bodies with limited, and co-ordinate authority of the different powers of government, and
3. The authority of the courts to act as interpreters of the constitution.

Leading examples of federation are the United States, Switzerland, Australia, Canada and Nigeria.

2.4.5.2 Unitary governmental systems

Unitary government occurs where all power to govern resides in the central or national authority. Although provision may be made for government on regional and local levels in unitary system, every act of the regional or local authority is performed under powers granted by the central government. Moreover, the central government may revoke this authority at any time. Most countries have unitary constitutions, but leading examples of unitary government systems are the United Kingdom, France, New Zealand, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

In the SADC region, South Africa, Botswana and Zimbabwe are good examples of unitary states with a three – tier governmental system, namely, central government, provincial councils, and local authorities. The Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013, , section 5 on tiers of government states:

The tiers of government in Zimbabwe are

a. The national Government;
b. Provincial and metropolitan councils; and
c. Local authorities, that is to say –
i. Urban councils, by whatever name called, to represent and manage the affairs of people in urban areas; and
ii. Rural councils, by whatever name called, to represent and manage the affairs of people in rural areas within the districts into which the provinces are divided

2.4.6 The role of Government

Students of government from Plato and Aristotle down to the present times have debate the nature and the extent of the role of government; and since the 18th century various positions have been adopted on this question in Western countries,

In contemporary America, for example, disagreement on the function which the federal government should perform is a point of difference between the Democratic and Republican parties.

It is a point of difference which in turn influences attitudes on civil rights, the running of the economy, and the role of government in important matters like education, medical care, housing, unemployment benefits, transport and so on.

III. A vast mass of functions

The concept state is describes as an independent political society occupying a defined geographical territory, the members of which are united together for the purpose of preservation of internal law and order and of resisting external force. A modern state, for example, Zimbabwe, is expected to deal with a vast mass of functions in order to deal with the needs of its citizens. To carry out these functions, it must have agents, organs through which to operate. The appointment or establishment of the agents or organs, the general nature of their functions and powers their interrelationships between them and the private citizens, form a large part of the constitution of a state.

IV. Proper ends and purposes of state, government and public administration

Each independent state exists to deal with definite ends and purposes. These proper ends and purposes which the contemporary state, government and public administration must facilitate to satisfy in democratic societies have been comprehensively expanded to include:

- external security;
- internal security in the form of peace, law and order
- equality and freedom;
- food security;
- decent housing
- healthcare
- education
- affording equitable economic benefits, employment prospects and job opportunities;
- responsive, responsible and representative government; and
- general welfare inclusive of social welfare needs.

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Learning Objectives:
To be able to:
1. Define and explain the term government.
2. Name types of government within SADC region.
3. Illustrate Aristotle's first classifications or topologies of government systems.
4. State the relationship between the executive and the legislative: presidential and parliamentary systems.
5. Discuss this statement: The parliamentary from has its origin in Great Britain.
6. Compare and contrast between monarchies and republics.
7. Describe governmental systems within the SADC region.