

The Participation Of Town Criers In The Enrollment Of The Population In Electoral Registers Within The Traditional Institutions In Fako Division

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Abstract—This paper examines the participation of town criers in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers within the traditional institutions in Fako division. It brings about the various strategies mobilized by town criers to participate in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers. These strategies here concern the use of non- verbal as well as verbal means of communication to mobilize the electorate to enroll in electoral registers. The non- verbal means of communication here involves the use of traditional instruments such as drums to convey message to the population, while the verbal means of communication consists of the use of the Bakweri native language of «Mokpwe» and the use of pidgin- English to communicate and transfer message to the population. The mobilization of these strategies by town criers produces effects which are apprehended at the level of the vulgarization of the practice of citizenship and the influence on public policy both at the local and national levels. To achieve this goal, we resorted to a scientific methodology in collecting data which consisted of the use of documentary techniques and field inquiry. The documentary techniques include the consultation of relevant documents as well as websites to obtain data. Field inquiry was achieved through interviews with traditional authorities and town criers. We equally resorted to the method of data analysis such as the qualitative method of data analysis to analyze our facts and data. The qualitative method of data analysis mainly consists of analyzing and interpreting the informations gotten from written and electronic documents as well as those obtained from verbal communication through field work. As a matter of fact, it covers the bulk of material that needs to be explained and interpreted. All these materials constitute facts to boast the research and give it a scientific connotation. A theory such as the theory of neo-institutionalism was mobilized to obey the

scientific requirements of a research in social science.

Keywords—Political participation, town crier, electoral register, traditional institution, Fako division

INTRODUCTION

The late 1980s and early 1990s in Africa were characterized by general trends towards plural politics and multi-party electoral competition¹. The popular political cliches were elections, multi-partysm, civil society and democracy². This global trend has prompted proponents of democracy to speak of the third wave of democratization in world history (the first two waves began in the 1820s and the 1940s)³. The most notable outcome of this historic turning point, often called Africa's second independence or Africa's second liberation, was the discrediting of more than 30 years of experimentation with single-party political systems in favour of more democratic forms of governance based on multiparty politics and the protection of human rights⁴. Elections are seen as a pillar of democracy, enabling voters to elect their representatives to exercise a public mandate on their behalf. They provide regular deadlines, giving citizens an opportunity to assess the ruling party's performance at the end of a term of office and to renew their trust in the same representatives or to opt for change⁵.

In the quarter of 1990 in Cameroon, a series of constitutional arrangements were engaged in order to

¹ Cited by Nnoli, Okwudiba (2000) Government and Politics in Africa: A Reader, Harare: AAPS Books, p.248.

² Ibid, p. 248.

³ Cited by Schraeder, P.J., (2004) African Politics and Society: A Mosaic in Transformation, Chicago: Thomson-Wadsworth, p. 223.

⁴ Ibid, p. 223.

⁵ Cited by Frère, Marie-Soleil (2011), Elections and the Media in Post Conflict Africa: Votes and Voices for Peace?, London: Zed Books, p. 2.

institutionalize political liberalism and give it a legal backing. Thirty government bills were tabled in parliament for scrutiny⁶. Prominent items in the bill include multiparty politics, press freedom, freedom to form associations, the state of emergency and the abolition of the 1962 law on subversion. This is known as «*constitutional liberalism*» which encompasses the rule of law, separation of powers and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion and property⁷. This wind of democratic change created a favourable condition for political competition through elections. These elections are characterized by citizen mobilization to enroll in electoral registers so as to be qualified to vote come election day. This mobilization is done by a series of forces, among which we have the town criers popularly known as palace messengers who play an active part in sensitizing the population to enroll in electoral registers and take part in elections. Within the traditional institutions in Fako division, which is our case study, town criers participate in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers in view of qualifying them to take part in elections. To continue, it will be relevant for us to first all proceed with the clarification of concepts.

I-CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

As recommended by Emile Durkheim, «*The researcher must first of all define the things to which he is treating so as to make known of what it is and that he should know of what it is in question*»⁸. It is a mental process by which fuzzy and imprecise constructs (concepts) and their constituent components are defined in concrete and precise terms⁹. As such, it is relevant to define the following concepts:

A-POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation can be defined as those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and politics. It encompasses many activities used by citizens to influence the selection of political leaders or the policies they pursue which is derived through the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, to

⁶ Fru, Nobert (2011), Political Participation in the North West Region of Cameroon. Thesis submitted for the award of a PhD in Political Science, University of Yaounde II Soa, p. 224.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Durkheim, Emile cited by Grawitz, Madeleine, (1996), *Méthodes des Sciences Sociales*, Paris: 10^{ème} édition, Dalloz, p. 345. (My translation).

⁹ Bhattacharje, Anol (2012) Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices, Scholar Commons: USF, p. 35. Available at http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&content=oa_textbooks accessed on the 14th August 2016.

campaign, to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government¹⁰.

B-TOWN CRIER

A town crier is defined as a person who is employed by a town council to make public announcements in the streets¹¹. Town criers have always been a veritable way of communicating in the past¹². Town criers operate in many institutions, especially traditional institutions where they are vehicles of disseminating information coming from the palace by the traditional rulers to the population.

C-ELECTORAL REGISTER

An electoral register is a list of names of all the people who are eligible to vote who have registered to do so¹³. The primary purpose of the voters' list is to confirm the individual's eligibility to vote in national or local elections¹⁴.

D-TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION

According to Orji and Olali, traditional institutions refer to the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs¹⁵. By these traditional political institutions, we mean those traditional bodies whose authorities have the scope of enforcing law and order in the particular traditional society by making use only of those sanctions authorized by the customs and traditions of the people over whom the authority is exercised¹⁶.

E-ADMINISTRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF FAKO DIVISION

Fako Division is found in the South West Region of Cameroon and has as head quarter Limbe. Administratively, Fako Division is made up of seven sub-divisions namely: Buea, Limbe 1, Limbe 2, Limbe 3, Muyuka, Tiko and West Coast and also of seven Municipal Councils led by a Mayor elected by the population. The seven councils correspond to the seven sub-divisions respectively. The division is also made up of chiefdoms following the prescriptions of the 1977 Decree on the Organization of chiefdoms into First class chiefdoms which are three in number, Second class chiefdoms which are nine in number

¹⁰ Available online at www.eisa.org accessed on July 17, 2016.

¹¹ www.wikipedia.org accessed on the 15/01/2020.

¹² The Traditional ways of communication. See www.vtpass.com accessed on the 19/01/2020.

¹³ Collin, P.H., (2004), *Dictionary of Politics and Government*, 3rd edition, London: BlumSBury, p. 84.

¹⁴ Voter Registration. See <http://aceproject.org> accessed on the 08/02/2020.

¹⁵ Orji and Olali cited by IHEMEJE, Godwin C. (2019) «Traditional Rulers, Electoral Process, and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Exploring Relevance. In *Advances in Politics and Economic*, Vol. 2, No. 1, P. 5

¹⁶ Cited by Aletum, T.M., op.cit, p. 200.

and Third class chiefdoms which are one hundred in number, making a total of one hundred and twelve (112) chiefdoms in the division each headed by a traditional authority¹⁷.

II-PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement constitutes an important step in any scientific research in social sciences. According to Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Claude Chamboredon and Jean Claude Passeron:

«A research object so partial and fragmented as it may be can only be defined and constructed depending on a theoretical problematic permitting to submit to a systematic question the aspects of reality put in question by the question proper to it »¹⁸.

In the field of social science, the research work is oriented towards the solution of a problem or to seek of a question which constitutes the first step of a research process¹⁹. The 1990 wind of democratization that blew across the African continent in general and Cameroon in particular, not excluding Fako division brought about significant and profound changes in the electoral process by rendering it more pluralistic and competitive. This competitive and pluralistic nature of the electoral process was characterized by the activities of several mobilization agents with the aim of mobilizing the population to enroll in electoral registers. Among these agents of mobilization of the population, we have the town criers who play an important part in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers within the traditional institutions in Fako division. They constitute a potential source of information and mobilization of the population in a variety of issues and precisely the enrollment of the population in electoral registers. From this perspective, the problem statement of this article is centered around the following questions:

How do town criers participate in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers within the traditional institutions in Fako division and what are the effects of this participation?

III-HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis constitutes the second step in a research in social sciences. It however constitutes a tentative solution of a problem. According to Bar and Scates:

« A hypothesis is a statement temporarily accepted as true in the light of what is, at the time,

known about a phenomena, and it is employed as a basis for action in the search for new truth, when the hypothesis is fully established, it may take the form of facts, principles and theories »²⁰.

The hypothesis of this article is as follows:

The town criers participate in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers within the traditional institutions in Fako division by mobilizing a variety of strategies; however, this participation produces a number of effects.

III-METHODOLOGY

In every scientific work and research, it is important to follow a particular methodology so as to avoid all forms of speculations and imagination. Research is a careful investigation or inquiry specifically through a search for new facts in any branch of knowledge²¹.

Research methodology is a contextual framework for research, a coherent and logical scheme based on views, beliefs and values that guide the choice researchers or other users make²². The aspects with respect to this involves the techniques of data collection and method of data analysis.

A-TECHNIQUES OF DATA COLLECTION

The techniques here include documentary techniques and field inquiry. According to Anol Bhattacharjee:

« Research design is a comprehensive plan for data collection in an empirical research projects »²³.

a-DOCUMENTARY TECHNIQUES

With respect to this technique, we resorted to written and electronic sources. For written sources, a series of textbooks, articles and thesis were exploited to this effect. For electronic sources, a series of websites were consulted to collect relevant information for the enrichment of this work.

b-FIELD STUDY OR INQUIRY

The technique of field study to which we gave priority in the collection of information was interview. According to Amir B. Marvasti:

«one of the most elementary forms of data collection is an interview which involves asking people questions and receiving answers from them »²⁴. In the course of this work, we conducted interviews with some town criers working in the palace who drilled us

¹⁷ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fako> accessed on June 9, 2017.

¹⁸ Bourdieu, P., Chamboredon J.C and Passeron J.C, (eds), (1983), *Le métier de sociologue: préalable épistémologique*, Paris: Mouton, p. 54. (My translation).

¹⁹ Sing, Y. K (2006), *Fundamentals of Research Methodology and Statistics*, New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, p. 20.

²⁰ Bar and Scates cited by Singh, Y. K, op.cit, p. 56.

²¹ See <https://bbamantra.com> accessed on the 18/12/2020

²² See <https://en.m.wikipedia.org> accessed on the 21/03/2021

²³ Bhattacharjee, Anol, op.cit, p. 35. Available at http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&content=oa_textbooks consulted on the 22nd February 2016.

²⁴ Marvasti, Amir B (2004), *Qualitative Research in Sociology*, London: Sage Publications, p. 14.

on their activities. Other individuals were equally contacted for that purpose.

B-METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The method use here is the qualitative method of data analysis. Qualitative research provides detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience²⁵. Thus, all the relevant information gotten from documents, from websites as well as verbal communications gotten from interviews conducted with town criers who serve in palaces in Fako division were all analyzed.

C-THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

They constitute explanations of a natural or social behavior, event or phenomenon. More formally, a scientific theory is a system of constructs (concepts) and propositions (relationships between those constructs) that collectively presents a logical, systematic, and coherent explanation of a phenomenon of interest within some assumptions and boundary conditions²⁶. The theory use to explain this work is the theory of Neo-institutionalism.

a-THE THEORY OF NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM

Neo-institutional theory is one of the main theoretical perspectives used to understand organizational behaviour as situated in and influenced by other organizations and wider social forces especially broader cultural rules and beliefs. Initial scholarship theorized and documented how the construction of broader cultural rules constituted actors and facilitated organizational isomorphism- the growing similarity of organizations in a field. Subsequently, the scope of the theory was expanded to account for the transformation and change of institutions, as well as the heterogeneity of actors and practices in fields. This has spawned new stands of theorizing such as that related to the institutional logics perspective. While neo-institutional theory is most closely informed by ideas and debates in sociology and management, it also draws from cognitive and social psychology, anthropology, political science and economics²⁷.

This theory is use in this article to explain the participation of town criers in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers in the traditional institutions in Fako division as an institution operating in an environment base on rules and values set up by the way of doing things (cognitive rules) which has become the normal routine. This is observed through the way town criers proceed in mobilizing the population to enroll in electoral registers, notably through the use of instruments such as drums and whistles and the language which they use in their communication with the population.

²⁵ Marvasti, Amir B., op.cit, p. 7.

²⁶ Bhattacharjee, Anol, op.cit, p. 25.

²⁷ See www.oxfordbibliographies.com accessed on November 24 2019.

1-THE MOBILIZATION OF A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES BY TOWN CRIERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ENROLLMENT OF THE POPULATION IN ELECTORAL REGISTERS IN THE TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN FAKO DIVISION

These strategies can be apprehended in the resort to Non- verbal means of communication and verbal means of communication.

i-THE RESORT TO NON- VERBAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Non- verbal communication is the process of conveying meaning without the use of words either written or spoken²⁸. Non- verbal communication includes, speed, tone and volume of voice, gestures and facial expressions, body posture, stance, and proximity to the listener, eye movements and contact, and dress and appearance²⁹. Within the traditional institutions in Fako division, town criers use instruments to communicate with the population. These instruments consist of drums, flutes and whistles. From antiquity, man has used all sorts of objects to convey meaning as a means of staying in social relations with other humans³⁰. These objects function as surveillance of the environment, transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next and as forms of entertainment³¹. Among these means of conveying meaning is the drum which seems to speak a proxy language that is close to the verbal language³². The town crier usually moves around the community either blowing whistle or hitting a drum calling on the population to mobilize for an event. This event can be a cultural event or community labor. It equally consists of political events such as the electoral process. This bears a double effect on the community both at the collective and individual level as follows:

« Collectively, drum language fosters social relations as it leads to affiliation, affection and affinity among people of the same cultural group. Individually, it fosters self- concept, confirmation of self, reduction of uncertainty and what Burgoon and Ruffiner in *Human Communication call impression management or creating proper image of ourselves*»³³.

ii- RESORT TO A VARIETY OF VERBAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION BY TOWN CRIERS

Apart from using instruments to convey messages in order to mobilize the community to enroll in electoral registers, town criers within the traditional

²⁸ Non-Verbal Communication. www.businessjargons.com accessed on the 20/01/2020.

²⁹ Non- verbal communication. See www.businessdictionary.com accessed on the 20/01/2020.

³⁰ Ima Usen, Emmanuel (2014) « Surrogate Language in the African Novel: A tool for Rural Development. Research on Humanities and Social Sciences, V. 4, No. 23.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Cited by Ima Usen, Emmanuel, op.cit, p. 75.

institutions in Fako division use languages to pass out their information to the population. During periods of voter's registration, most people get information from them concerning the date and place to register themselves. That is why Chief Ikome Philipp Mokwa of Wokeka village in Buea sub division thinks that:

« *The two popular languages used by town criers to mobilize the population to enroll in electoral registers are «Mokpwe» which is the native Bakweri language and pidgin-English spoken by almost everybody* »³⁴.

i-THE USE OF THE BAKWERI VERNACULAR LANGUAGE (MOKPWE) TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE COMMUNITY

A vernacular language is the native language of a specific population living within the country³⁵. The word vernacular originates from the latin word vernaculus, meaning native or indigenous³⁶. Within the traditional institutions in Fako division, the indigenous language spoken is the «Mokpwe» language which is an important tool of communication among the people of the Bakweri community. Language is an important instrument of socialization and fosters solidarity among people of the same ethnic group. The use of the vernacular/native language by town criers to participate in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers is very effective in rural areas with a very low rate of scholarization. More to that, using this language is a symbol of solidarity since it represents their culture and people, especially the Bakweri natives recognize themselves through this language.

ii-THE USE OF PIDGIN- ENGLISH BY TOWN CRIERS TO MOBILIZE THE POPULATION TO ENROLL IN ELECTORAL REGISTERS

Pidgin- English is a simple form of a language which speakers of a different language use to communicate³⁷. According to the American English dictionary, Pidgin- English is a mixed language, or jargon, incorporating the vocabulary of one or more languages with a very simplified form of the grammatical system of one of these and not used as the main language of any of its speakers³⁸. In Cameroon in general and precisely within the traditional institutions in Fako division, Pidgin- English is widely spoken and is used as a means of interaction and communication among the various ethnic communities living in the division. Cameroon comprises of many small ethnic groups each with its own dialect, it is not surprising that a single language

should be chosen as a « *lingua franca* » to help in communicating between these diverse people³⁹. Augustin Simo Bobda perceives it as the language of the common man⁴⁰. This language is easily understood by the Fako indigenes as well as the member who come from other parts of the country and residing in the division. That is why Mola Peter a town crier in Great Soppo in Buea said that:

«*Pidgin-English is the only language that is highly understood in our community by the indigenes as well as other communities residing in our land. It is the language of everybody whether educated or not, young and old*»⁴¹.

2-EFFECTS OF THE PARTICIPATION OF TOWN CRIERS IN THE ENROLLMENT OF THE POPULATION IN ELECTORAL REGISTERS WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN FAKO DIVISION

These effects can be apprehended in the aspects of the vulgarization of the practice of citizenship (the culture of participation) and the influence on public policy (both at the local and national levels).

i-THE VULGARIZATION OF THE PRACTICE OF CITIZENSHIP (THE CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION)

Town criers are agents of dissemination of information in the community. Through their actions, they create a significant effect on the population in a variety of issues. With respect to the electoral process, more precisely the phase of enrollment in electoral registers, they are a means through which the population receive information concerning the electoral process, for example they communicate to the population regarding the date when Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) will visit the community for the purpose of enrollment of electors in electoral registers and equally on the requirements needed in order to qualify for the process of enrollment. The result of this call and sensitization of the town crier is that it influences the population to act in response to this call by registering in electoral registers so as to be qualified to vote during election proper. Enrollment in electoral registers is a condition to be fulfilled so as to qualify to vote. According to the 2012 electoral code of Cameroon:

« *Every person of Cameroonian nationality of either sex, who has reached the age of 20 (twenty) years, is registered on an electoral register and is free*

³⁴ Cited by Chief Philipp Mokwa of Wokeka village in an interview conducted on the 26/07/2019.

³⁵ See www.worldatlas.com assessed on the 22/01/2020.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Definition of pidgin-English. See <https://www.colinsdictionary.com> accessed on the 14/03/2020.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mbuagbaw, Tambi E, Brain, Robert and Palmer, Robin (eds), (1987), A History of the Cameroon, UK: Longman House, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Simo Bobda, Augustin cited by Dibussi Tande (2006) « The politics of Pidgin-English in Cameroon ». www.dibussi.com accessed on the 25/01/2020.

⁴¹ Cited by Mola Peter in in an exchange in Great Soppo on the 21/11/2020.

from all cases of disqualification provided for by law, shall be entitled to be an elector »⁴².

It is thus evident that the activities of town criers in view of mobilizing the population to enroll in electoral registers bring about a significant effect in shaping their minds towards the political and civic values of the Republic. The consequence of this is the action taken by the population in order to express these civic and political values which they have acquired from the sensitization tour made by the town criers.

ii-EFFECTS ON THE INFLUENCE OF PUBLIC POLICY (BOTH AT THE LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVELS)

There are a variety of definitions of public policies, from the classic concepts offered by political science to the more recent ones⁴³. The concept of public policy simply refers to political plans affecting the general good of all the population⁴⁴. We all know that the main aim for people to enroll in electoral registers is to manifest their right to vote in elections. Free elections are one of the main forms of political participation of the citizen in democratic regimes. They are the mechanism through which citizens can express their judgments on the way government takes care of their interest, deciding on who will represent them and who will govern⁴⁵. Pursuant of article 13 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1981), every citizen has the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through their elected representatives⁴⁶. This participation in the government is achieved through elections where the populations vote those who will speak and take actions on their interest. Dodzi Kokoroko in the following statement defines an election as:

« *The instrument of the designation of the governors and appears as a substitute to hazard and prediction of oracles, hereditary or co-optation; a viable alternative for autodesignation and a tool for the*

⁴² See to this effect the 2012 electoral code of the Republic of Cameroon.

⁴³ Almeida, Azevedo and Gomez, Richardo- Correa (2018), « The process of public policy: literature review, theoretical reflections and suggestions for future research, In cad. EBAPE.BR ? V. 16, No. 3, p. 445. See https://www.scielo.br/pdf/cebape/v16n3/en_1679-3951-cebape-16-03 assessed on the 09/06/2020.

⁴⁴ Collin, P.H., op.cit, p. 197.

⁴⁵ IESE and CMI (2010), Conference on the Electoral Processes, Liberation Movements and Democratic Change in Africa. A challenge for democracy: low turnout in Mozambique, Lesotho and Zambia, Luis de Brito Institute of social and Economic Studies, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Cited by Sango Ndeh, Martin (2011) « Election Cacophony in Cameroon: Reading the frustrations of the oppressed electorate 1990- 2007, In Cameroon Journal of Democracy and Human Rights, p. 81.

participation of citizens in the management of public affairs »⁴⁷.

CONCLUSION

Putting an end to this article, the major issues discussed with respect to the participation of town criers in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers within the traditional institutions in Fako division consists of the mobilization of a variety of strategies by town criers to participate in the enrollment of the population in electoral registers and the effects produced by such participation. These strategies rest on the use of symbols or better still non- verbal means of communication to with the population. This comprises of the use of local and traditional instruments to deliver messages to the population. With respect to the use of verbal means of communication, mention is made of the use of two languages, notably the vernacular language known as « *Mokpwe* » which is the language of the Bakweri people and pidgin-English which constitute important tools of communication within the traditional institutions in Fako division. These strategies as earlier mentioned produces effects at the level of the vulgariza of the practice of citizenship (the culture of participation) and equally influences public policy both at the local and national level.

It is however relevant to envisage future perspectives with respect to this article. Town criers despite the tremendous growth of modern form of communication still have a part to play in the mobilizing the community. They should be preserved and should equally adapt to the trends of modern society characterized by numerous changes and transformations in the social interactions between individuals.

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⁴⁷ Cited by Koroko, Dzoki (2009), « Les élections disputées : Réussites échecs : In Pouvoirs- 129, p. 115.

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