

Developing a Culture of Political Tolerance

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Abstract

This article examines the concept of political tolerance in relation to the practice of multiparty politics in Tanzania. Tolerance is identified as a key component of democracy. However, elections in Tanzania are conducted in an atmosphere of mistrust between the ruling party and its government and the opposition parties. Political intolerance has been exhibited by the ruling party and also by opposition parties. Other important political players including the bureaucracy and state institutions have had a role in compounding the problem. Election officials in districts had a major part in the perpetuation of political intolerance. They are an essential factor in so far as the opposition claims that elections are biased in favour of the ruling party. The consequences of allowing such a situation to continue unchecked may be disastrous for Tanzanian democracy. It is important therefore to bring together the key players to discuss the problem and find a common strategy to deal with it.

Introduction

This article is about multiparty politics and political tolerance. In many countries, especially in Asia, Latin America and Africa, including Tanzania, there is an unfolding of a liberalized political order accentuated by multiparty democracy and the rule of law. Amid this process of transformation there is a haunting question: whether the new order is coming with the requisite culture of tolerance. This question is relevant against the backdrop of creeping political intolerance and suppression in countries which have returned or are returning to plural politics. The question becomes more significant and inevitable because political tolerance is acknowledged as one of the hallmarks of democracy and a multiparty system. It is the barometer for indicating whether a fledgling democratic system will be enduring and sustainable. The significance of political tolerance cannot be overemphasized. Democracy cannot function

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successfully in the absence of a political consensus on issues of general social interest, such as peace and security of the country, without taking into consideration tolerance, and especially the political tolerance.

The need for tolerance, and especially for political tolerance, has been continuously emphasized because of its linkages with the social power of the people, peaceful resolution of social conflicts, and the resolution of different disputes among people. There is also a general opinion that the increased level of internal conflicts leads to anxiety and has a negative impact on internal peace and security, and therefore the concern about the question of political tolerance as a factor for safeguarding peace and security is a must for all democratic societies. In an era when ideological differences are disappearing, the entire process of democratization and the functioning of democracy is being built on the basis of new values. In order to achieve political, economic and social transformation, political tolerance deserves special attention without there exists potential for disastrous societal disturbances.

In this article I argue that political tolerance is pivotal to institutionalizing democracy in a developing political society. It is pivotal not only because it stands for political pluralism, bi-partism and multi-partism, but also because it necessitates mutual political restraint, dialogue, forbearance and reconciliation. I consider these factors as sine qua non of political stability and enduring democracy. I also point out that political tolerance is more critical during elections as democracy means that the people govern and authority is derived solely from the consent of the governed. Consent is achieved by holding elections at stated intervals so as to determine who holds power. In this regard it is important to acknowledge that there are three critical pillars of democracy, namely free and fair elections, political tolerance and accepting the results of elections.

As far as elections are concerned there are four things to observe. Firstly, elections need to be free and fair and this means that there is a clear understanding of the process. The constitutional and political dispensation must be acceptable to all voters. This can be achieved by educating the masses about party politics and elections. Secondly, the elections must be inclusive. This means that the voters should be made up of a large proportion of the adult population, and they must also have the right to stand for office themselves. A government that is chosen by a small exclusive group is not democratic, no matter how effective its internal workings may

be. Thirdly, free political activity must be permitted and there must be free choice between different policies, parties and candidates. This means that a country's voting population should have the freedom to exercise their democratic right by voting for people or parties of their choice without being afraid of any interference or intimidation. Lastly, election officials should be neutral and conduct all the election activities openly. What is more, the electoral body is instituted as a fair and unbiased umpire that buoys the confidence of political parties and the electorate.

This article is divided into three parts. Part one deals with the meaning of tolerance, where it comes from, studies of political tolerance and why it is important. In part the focus will be on developments in Tanzania, paying special attention to its democratization process with a view to identifying apparent and real problems that could threaten the attainment of a democratic society. In the third and last part I propose ways and means of ensuring Tanzania proceeds on the right path towards developing not only a culture of political tolerance but also observes the key signposts or principles of democracy. The article concludes by reiterating the need for countries and political leaders to work for the survival and sustainability of the new order (liberal democracy) through the manifestation of its trait of political tolerance. Political leaders need to exhibit ennobling virtues of political culture as embodied in tolerance, restraint, cooperation, consultation and reconciliation. It is only through this way that we can build a culture of political tolerance necessary for political stability, peace and security and eventually human development in all its aspects.

What is Political Tolerance?

In a discussion of a complex concept like political tolerance it is important to answer the obvious question, which is, what exactly is meant by political tolerance? This is important because definitions differ and concepts have been known to acquire different meanings at different times and places. Many studies about political tolerance have been carried out and a majority of the authors have defined political tolerance in its broadest sense with the overriding theme pointing to an acceptance of views, actions, and lifestyles which are unfamiliar, unliked or disapproved of by individuals. It seems to imply a level of fairness or equal application of rules or norms of conduct and an allowance of freedom for those individuals holding different views or opinions. It means that those who hold different ideas or views have the opportunity to express their ideas or participate in things they are interested in, even if those ideas or activities are disliked by others including the party

or government in power. In that regard Avery (2001) defines political tolerance as the willingness to extend basic rights and civil liberties to persons and groups whose viewpoints differ from one's own. Avery posits that political tolerance is a central tenet of liberal democracy. The implication of this proposition is that the expression of such views or beliefs must be protected by another core democratic principle, which is majority rule with respect for the rights of individuals or groups in the minority. Without safeguards for the free expression of divergent opinions, we risk a tyranny of the majority. In a free and open society, public deliberations expose "bad" ideas instead of suppressing them.

Adopting the central theme of protection of civil liberties especially towards minorities Hill (1997) defines political tolerance as acceptance of the civil liberties of all groups – freedom of speech, assembly, and so forth – regardless of their political stance. In the same vein Finkel (2000) sees political tolerance as the willingness to extend procedural liberties such as free speech and association to unpopular or disliked individuals or groups. He concurs with Sullivan and Transue (1999) that such extension of civil liberties to disliked individuals or groups is essential for a stable and effective democratic system. This position was also the assertion of Sniderman et al (1989) that the more tolerant citizens are of the rights of others, the more secure the rights of all, their own included; hence the special place accorded to political tolerance in contemporary conception of democratic values and democratic citizenship.

Other definitions of political tolerance have focused on the need to accept the opposition in the process of governing. In this connection Crick (1973: 63) defined political tolerance "as the degree to which we accept things of which we disapprove." Crick's stance is echoed by Sullivan et al. (1986) who argue that there is no issue of tolerance or intolerance unless there is competition with opposing entities. In such situations there is need to observe the general rules of equality and tolerance. Sullivan et al. posit further that a tolerant individual does not restrict or suppress ideas that he or she dislikes or disagrees with and more importantly does not restrict or suppress ideas that are diametrically opposed to what one believes.

It is not possible in this short article to survey all the definitions of political tolerance. Suffice it to say the concept revolves around the notion of accommodation of other people's views, ideas, beliefs, actions, and lifestyles that are different from those held by ourselves. The next important question

to be addressed in this article is what theory can we rely on to explain political tolerance. Put differently, is there a theory on political tolerance? Sullivan et al. found three different major theories of political tolerance - the liberal view, the conservative democratic view and the federalist theory. In the liberal view, tolerance is extended toward any type of expression, as long as it doesn't harm others. The individual is largely autonomous and tolerance toward unpopular views is a necessary ingredient on all levels. Civil liberties are protected because only harmful expressions are prohibited.

The conservative democratic theory, on the other hand, is not premised on high levels of tolerance in the mass public. Democracy can survive without high levels of tolerance among the masses, or even among the majority of the governing elite. As long as a sizable dissenting elite is loyal to democratic ideals and tolerance, then they have the ability and duty to protect civil liberties.

In the third theory, the federalist view, it is not required that either masses or elites have high levels of tolerance. Instead, diversity, decentralization and constitutional checks will provide for the protection of civil rights. Groups will compete with each other and as long as groups have access to the process, civil rights will be protected.

It is obvious from the three theories that each has some "good" and "bad" propositions but in general terms they all emphasize the protection of civil liberties, subscription to democratic ideals and tolerance. Beyond the sheer philosophy, however, there are serious social and legal dimensions of tolerance which are presented by today's multicultural societies including Tanzania. There are at least two fundamental conundrums which arise. One is described by Parekh (1994), who is regarded as one of the outstanding advocates of multicultural ideals, realizes that the liberal society is tolerant of differences even when it disapproves of them. But it is also collectively committed to certain values and cannot tolerate every cultural practice. In other words society must determine its own range of "permissible diversity". This is why dialogue and consultations between different groups is necessary. It is also in the same context that in Tanzania, for example, female circumcision is discouraged. The other area of debate focuses on a different aspect of tolerance and its limits. Horton (1993) observes that it has become an increasingly urgent issue of theory and practice as to how tolerant liberalism is, or can be, of cultural and religious groups which do not

themselves subscribe unreservedly or without qualification to what have been taken to be the basic values of liberalism.

Clearly, tolerance is not a panacea, a clear recipe for social cohesion, even when we were sure what it is supposed to look like. Further, promoting among the majority a tolerance of minorities can be seen as creating a source of problems. With specific reference to Britain Parekh (1990: 67) writes, "...by not convincing the majority that minority cultures enrich it and are a valuable resource, and that their preservation is in its interest, the liberal response encourages it to think that it is bearing the moral burden of tolerance as an earnest of its generosity towards them, thereby paving the way for an unhealthy and inherently contentious relationship between the two." The lesson here is that tolerance must be more than begrudging acceptance, indifference or even peaceful coexistence, since this still might provide for widespread discrimination and marginalization. To move beyond these, for a start, Parekh proposes we must come to a better understanding of the multi-factor causes of intolerance. One way of proceeding to understand the cause of intolerance is to pose and answer the question: why is political tolerance important?

The Importance of Political Tolerance

There are a number of different theories as to why political tolerance is important, either on an individual level or as part of the general Democratic Theory. Sullivan et al. argue that tolerance can help keep a society together, even in the face of intense conflict. If there is a general observation of rules of equality and tolerance, then the conflicts can be dealt with in a peaceful manner. If a large percentage of the populace does not agree to tolerant principles, democracy may be in trouble, they suggest. It may be, in fact, the most fundamental prerequisite for democracy, they add, because it is largely impossible for a democratic society to be completely homogenous. Another argument Sullivan and his co-authors extend is that tolerance is part of the civil rights that individuals can expect in a democracy. Individuals should be able to expect to live their lives without fear of physical violence. On an individual level, tolerance ensures that the expression of opinions can be made without fear of reprisal. Attitudes of tolerance also set the stage for actual behaviors that citizens have. Individuals with tolerant attitudes will tend to have tolerant behavior. However, a preponderance of intolerant attitudes, they argue, may be dangerous. "...if intolerant impulses underlie seemingly tolerant behavior, it is probably only a matter of time and circumstance before this impulse will surface" (Sullivan, 1982: 51).

Looking at the importance of political tolerance, Gibson (1992b) claims that intolerance violates the liberty of citizens. In his study he found that freedom and tolerance are connected. "Those who do not feel free to express themselves politically are more likely to be intolerant of others, to have less heterogeneous peer groups and less tolerant spouses, and to live in less tolerant communities" (Gibson, 1992b:338). The logical extension of Gibson's argument is that intolerance by some may also serve as an example to others, encouraging them to be intolerant, as well.

In broad terms political tolerance is important because it is widely regarded as the most basic value of a democratic society. Those who subscribe to this argument do so by pointing out the fact that consensus is achievable only in a narrow range of issues, and therefore, citizens of democratic societies must permanently live side by side with people who question their political values. In this regard it does not matter whether one argues from the point of view of individual freedom or is just looking for pragmatic solutions for the dilemmas of pluralism; tolerance appears as a cornerstone-value of the ideal political community. Political tolerance is, at the same time, a fundamentally controversial value. Some scholars including Sullivan et al. argue that universal tolerance is not required or even desired for the success of Democratic theory. In fact, Sullivan et al. posit a situation where a universally tolerant regime would be tolerant toward undemocratic groups who act within the legitimate confines, even if this could lead to the end of the democracy. This is known as the paradox of tolerance and they ask: "...are citizens of a democracy obliged to tolerate those who, if they prevailed, would destroy the practice of tolerance?" (1982: 9). They remind us that tolerance is one of many values that are important to democracy and there must be a balance between tolerance and these other values.

Crick agrees with this view. Tolerance "is a value to be held among other values - such as justice, and liberty itself, but also order and truth; it can never always be right to be tolerant; there are occasions on which we should be intolerant" (1973: 64). The question for Crick is what can be done without overthrowing authority? Society itself should ideally and collectively state what can and cannot be tolerated as well as what can be enshrined in law or other regulations guiding society. It may not be as simple as stating as Mayo (1960) did that intolerance in the name of tolerance can be legitimate. At this juncture it may be pertinent to attempt a survey of causes of intolerance by asking a simple question: where does tolerance come from?

Where does Political Tolerance come from?

A number of studies have looked at this question and a number of explanations have come up over the years. The explanations typically fall into one of three categories: social, political, or psychological. The social explanations run the gamut of usual social explanations found in the literature and include education, age, religion, gender, participation, and ideology with education being the most commonly cited explanation. Stouffer (1955), for example, focused mainly on education in his explanation of levels of tolerance, finding that increased education lead to increased tolerance. "...schooling puts a person in touch with people whose ideas and values are different from one's own. And this tends to carry on, after formal schooling is finished, through reading and personal contacts" (Stouffer, 1955: 127). and Grigg's research (1960) supported the link between tolerance and education. In their study, Nunn et al. (1978) state that in 1978, the relationship between education and higher levels of tolerance is even stronger than it was in Stouffer's study. They claim that education increases "the likelihood of gaining specific knowledge about civil liberties and the democratic process," it "increase(s) awareness of the varieties of human experience that legitimize wide variation in ... values," and it makes probable "that one's cognitive development will be characterized by the flexible, rational strategies of thinking which encourage democratic restraint" (Nunn et al., 1978: 61).

With respect to age, Stouffer (1955) found that older cohorts were less tolerant than younger cohorts. Cutler and Kaufman (1975) found an aging effect wherein all age levels grow more tolerant over time. In older cohorts, however, they found that the change is not nearly as significant as it is in younger cohorts. Davis (1975) also found an increase in tolerance over time, claiming that cohort replacement lead to higher educational levels, which in turn lead to higher levels of tolerance. He also found that younger cohorts were more tolerant than older cohorts.

Religion also made a difference according to Stouffer's results. Referring to the USA he found that southern Protestants were less tolerant than Catholics. An interesting observation was that groups that were perceived to be a threat to religion, such as Communists, were also a target of intolerance among the religious. Nunn et al. found that Americans who were the most committed to religion were the most intolerant, with Protestants showing the least tolerance. Sullivan et al. found that there may be some left-bias in the religion measure. They do find, however, that those classified as non-religious are

more tolerant than those who are classified as religious. "The major impact of religion on tolerance appears to be through a sort of secular detachment rather than through denominational training or theology" (Nunn et al., 1982: 144).

In the study of gender, Stouffer found that women were less tolerant, but found no convincing explanation as to why this was so. Nunn et al., found that gender gap in tolerance grew since Stouffer's study, placing the blame largely on the effects of gender inequality. Sullivan et al. dispute this however, since gender inequality was greater in the 1950s than in the 1970s, yet intolerance levels were higher among women in the 1970s.

Among the political forces looked at as possible causes of tolerance are ideology, political threat, political involvement and abstract principles of tolerance. The commonly accepted conception of ideology and tolerance points to conservatives as less tolerant than liberals. This is confirmed by the data. According to Sullivan et al., since tolerance is strongly associated with non-economic aspects of liberalism and the methods used to test the Stouffer method, with their left-bias, previous studies are obviously going to find higher levels of tolerance among liberals and lower levels among conservatives.

In addition to education, Stouffer focused on perceived political threat as a source of intolerance. When a dissenting group is perceived to be a threat, they are less likely to be tolerated. "Previous studies have shown that the level of intolerance in individuals is directly related to perceptions of threat posed by dissident groups." Sullivan et al. also found that intolerance increased with perceived level of threat. "In comparison with the other independent variables, threat emerges as one of the most important determinants of tolerance" (Sullivan et al., 1982: 194).

Stouffer also found that political involvement affected tolerance. He found that there was a difference between the very active politically and the mass public in levels of tolerance. McClosky (1964) found the same when he looked at party convention delegates compared to the general public. Sullivan et al. found that those who participated the most were the most tolerant. Nunn et al. (1978) had similar findings, but that the differences disappear when controls for education and other things are introduced. Jackman's (1972) findings agreed with the Nunn study.

A number of studies, such as Prothro and Grigg (1960) and McClosky (1964) found high differences between the levels of support for abstract principles of tolerance and concrete application of the ideas. Lawrence (1976) found otherwise as did Sullivan et al., who claimed "that those who endorse the abstract norms are most likely to be tolerant in practical circumstances" (Sullivan et al., 1982: 207).

Though the majority of these studies were conducted in the USA, most of the observations are relevant to other countries including Tanzania. In the Tanzanian case other variables can be found (e.g., the legacy of the one-party system, weak opposition parties, resistance to change on the part of the ruling party, lack of civic education, nascent pluralism, etc.) that can be used to explain the apparent lack of political tolerance that has started to emerge and now poses as a threat to the new political order. To put the discussion of political tolerance in Tanzania in its proper context one needs to trace the development of multi-party politics from 1992 to present.

Multi-party Politics and Political Tolerance in Tanzania

Tanzania attained independence in 1961 with a multi-party constitutional framework. Four years later the country's constitution was changed and Tanzania became a one-party state. The one-party system survived for 27 years and in 1992 the country reverted back to a multi-party political system. The hitherto ruling party needed only readjustment while the new parties (the opposition) had to start from scratch. From its inception the multi-party system did not therefore provide for a level playing field for all the participants. The transitional period coincided with the timetable for elections that were to be held in 1995. During this time, the ruling party, Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) consolidated its position and controlled all institutions. It established the rules under which new parties were to operate and frequently intervened in the "national interest" (Ahluwalia and Zegeye, 2001). The CCM presented itself as the party that upheld Tanzania's record of peace, stability and solidarity in contrast to the opposition which CCM claimed was bent on creating chaos and misunderstanding that could lead to civil strife. All sorts of things were said to discredit the young opposition parties. CCM refused media access to the opposition by not relinquishing its hold on the sole national broadcasting agency, Radio Tanzania. And more significantly, the CCM government refused to repeal 40 pieces of repressive legislation which made it difficult for the opposition to function, as well as to mount a democratic education program.

The CCM government continued to intimidate the opposition well into the first multi-party general elections held in 1995. During 1995 as the case had been before, CCM remained dominant and the boundaries between the government and the party remained blurred. The constant harassment by the CCM created a situation whereby the opposition parties found it difficult to maintain a coherent position. The opposition could not even provide a viable alternative set of policies. They also found it extremely difficult to penetrate the rural areas where the CCM had its strongest support, making them largely an urban phenomenon. By the time the 1995 multiparty elections were held 12 opposition political parties were granted registration but gained only 38% of the total votes in the presidential elections and 60 seats against CCM's 214 in Parliament. Although the ruling party, CCM retained power, the election results showed it was being challenged and that it did not enjoy the kind of popular support it had before.

In the year 2000 Tanzania held its second multiparty elections. These elections were not different from the 1995 elections with CCM able to ensure that the all parties were not operating on a level playing field. Intimidation of the opposition continued albeit in a new and sophisticated manner. First, the abolition of state subsidies to political parties meant that the opposition was unable to fund their campaigns adequately. Secondly, the problem of differentiation between CCM and the government/state remained. Thirdly, CCM was again able to intimidate the opposition through the use of police supervising political rallies. Fourthly, it denied the opposition unlimited use of the dominant government media and other properties including stadia for political rallies. In the final analysis the opposition was unable to make any significant electoral inroads. In fact they performed worse compared to 1995.

The 2000 elections did not only mirror the 1995 elections but were actually marred by claims of electoral fraud and violence and deaths in 2001. Although the Political Parties Act (1992) prohibits religion to be the basis of a political party, the ruling CCM accused CUF the main opposition party in Zanzibar to be an essentially Muslim party (Campbell, 1999). Parliamentary elections in Zanzibar were annulled due to irregularities in 16 of the 50 constituencies. A Commonwealth team of observers commented that the election was a shambles. And despite the opposition's demand that a new election should be held, the CCM government rejected the call leading to further violence. The repression of the opposition resulted in people fleeing from Zanzibar to Kenya, including some CUF members of parliament (Ahluwalia and Zegeye, 2001).

It is obvious from the above that the transition from one-party state to plural politics in Tanzania has not been smooth. The elections have been held in an atmosphere and manner that is difficult to judge as having been free and fair. Intimidation of opposition parties, reliance on a repressive legal framework, and manipulation of the constitution as well as use of state organs by the ruling party all indicate a sense of insecurity and lack of political tolerance. In both general elections independent candidates were not allowed, which means that people were compelled to join political parties in order to stand as candidates. This implies that certain basic civil rights were denied those who aspired to contest in the elections.

This unfortunate development in the democratization process in Tanzania does not end with the general elections. During the November 2004 civic polls in the country signs of intolerance and uncompromising behaviour between some bureaucrats at regional, district and ward level on the one hand and opposition Members of Parliament on the other have emerged. In a few instances members of the opposition parties have been mistreated and at times manhandled. A few cases may serve as examples. Lipumba, Mrema and Cheyo have been mishandled, interrogated by police and even taken to court for cases which analysts consider political.

Prof. Ibrahim Lipumba, Chairman of the Civic United Front (CUF) has said that his recent interrogation by the police is a preparation aimed at raising trumped up charges against him so that he does not vie for the presidency come October 2005. Lipumba was interrogated by the police in connection with allegations he made in early December upcountry against CCM that it had rigged the 1995 and 2000 elections to deny CUF victory and that CCM had killed innocent civilians in Zanzibar in 2001. Prof. Lipumba is reported to have threatened that if CCM rigs the 2005 elections blood will be spilled. TLP, on the other hand, is bitter against the government for ordering re-auditing of its accounts. TLP accounts were first audited by external auditors (Harold and Company) following allegations of embezzlement of TLP funds including the purchase of a Tsh. 40 million house. The Registrar of Political Parties has asked the Controller and Auditor General (CAG) to audit TLP finances. The Chairman of TLP, Augustine Mrema claims that the government's move to audit the party's finances is part of the government's machinations against his party and him.

In the run up to the civic polls in November 2004 political activities revolved around two major issues: grassroots (civic) elections on the mainland and the

compilation of a permanent voters register on both parts of the republic. With respect to the civic elections (covering villages, *mitaa* and *vitongoji*), CCM, the ruling party, scooped a majority of seats and the opposition parties won in a few areas. The opposition parties complained of irregularities during the elections including their candidates being disqualified for reasons not fully explained by the Returning Officers. The ruling party was also accused of using government officials (e.g. the police) to harass opposition candidates and deny them a level playing field during campaigns. In some parts of the country the elections were marred by violence and people (at least two) lost their lives. The situation was particularly bad in Dar es Salaam which saw a re-run of the elections in some villages and *mitaa*.

The exercise of compiling the permanent voters' register was and still is proceeding smoothly on the mainland, but the situation in Zanzibar and especially Pemba was far from calm. There are ongoing complaints and counter accusations from the two main parties (CCM and CUF) that their members are being denied their right to register as voters. It is also said that there are plots by each of the two parties to bring people from the mainland to bolster their ranks in the registration exercise. The tension was higher at the beginning of the exercise in southern Pemba where some people have lost lives as well. With time the situation improved and the Zanzibar Electoral Commission invited a select group of diplomatic missions to visit registration centers in Pemba. And in his end of month address to the nation President Mkapa decried the deteriorating situation in respect of violence in conducting political activities in the country. He was particularly concerned with the way parties conducted themselves in the civic elections and called upon the political leaders across the party spectrum to observe civility. Opposition parties on the other hand complain bitterly that there is a plot by the ruling party to bar their top leaders from contesting the coming general elections slated for October 2005. Two opposition parties (CUF and TLP) have made their position very clear in this regard.

Conclusion

It can be said, without exaggeration, that there is generally an atmosphere of mistrust between the ruling party and its government and the opposition parties. This trend is showing signs of escalating especially with the ongoing claims and counter claims between the ruling party and the main opposition parties. Political intolerance has been exhibited by both the ruling party and the opposition parties. Other important players including the bureaucracy and state institutions, notably the police, have had a role in compounding the

problem. The bureaucracy, specifically election officials in districts, had a major part in the perpetuation political intolerance. They are an essential factor in so far as the opposition claims that they are biased in favour of the ruling party. As stated above, the consequences of allowing such a situation to continue unchecked may be disastrous for democracy. It is important therefore to bring together the key players (stakeholders) to a joint meeting specifically convened to discuss the problem and find a common strategy to deal with it.

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