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Review on Chapter fifteen of Salient issues in Government and Nigeria’s politics, “An Overview of the Idea of Pressure Group.”

A pressure group can simply be defined as a formal or organized body with a common interest and a fundamental aim of pressuring any governmental institution with the goal of their policies and laws to its own advantage. It is referred to as ‘The functional representative’ due to the idea that various groups represent different sectors of the society based on their functions.

Pressure groups can seem similar to political parties’ activities but there are a few distinguishing factors. The first is that, unlike political parties, pressure groups do not seek power and rather their aim is to influence political decisions. Secondly, political parties have a wide range of policies as opposed to pressure groups which narrow their goals.

Furthermore, pressure groups are not held accountable for their actions while the opposite goes for political parties. Last but not least, political parties are more formally organized than pressure groups. Upon the wide array of differences between the two groups, there are also some similarities that exist between them and hence they are able to relate together in order to achieve certain social changes.

Functions and aims of pressure groups include; linking the government to the people; promoting participation in government; serving as a source of information to government; curtailing of dictatorial tendencies; promotion of the interest of the minority; and influencing legislation.

The basis of their existence is to checkmate and make democracy better but problems can arise when the democratic process becomes by a few specific groups with narrow interests. In situations whereby the pressure groups remain rigid and refuse to compromise on certain matters, it can lead to the potential monopolization of the democratic process by focusing public debate on a few specific issues.

The downside to pressure groups is that they are often unwilling to compromise even with the knowledge that the government might be incapacitated of meeting their needs due to shortage of fund. An example of such a situation is when some professional institutions, such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities or ASUU, go on a strike. This disrupts school calendars and staff income and the citizens suffer all together.

Pressure groups are classified based on the functions they perform and how they go about it. The types of pressure groups include; Interest groups which are seen as sectional groups representing people in the society. An example is the trade units such as Confederation of British Industry (CBI); Cause groups. These are groups which seek to promote particular causes and they include charities and environmental groups; Insider groups. These are regularly consulted by the government and have easy access to ministers and/or legislators. It includes the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA); Outsider groups. Unlike insider groups, these have no links to government and have to impact using other methods. Examples include the Animal and Earth Liberation Fronts; Anomic groups. These groups are unpredictable and not guided by an appropriate behavioral style; Associational groups which are registered with appropriate authorities; and Non-Associational groups which have no formal registrations.

The degree to which pressure groups are successful in achieving their goals can often depend on how legitimately recognized they are by the population, media and people in power. Pressure groups can adopt a number of strategies in achieving their goals such as; lobbying legislators, ministers and other government machineries or even lobbying such officials through friends or family.