



FOR CIRCULATION

Democratic Performance and the Need for Objective Citizens' Input

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Introduction

Citizens are the ultimate assessors of a democratic government's performance. More often than not, their views are expressed through the vote, periodically as per constitutional provision. Indeed, for Botswana, conversations around government's performance or lack thereof are usually intensified during electoral cycles.

This paper is based on BCPI expert roundtable discussions meant to educate citizens on how to measure democratic performance. Botswana is battling different economic and social problems in the form of a high unemployment rate, endemic corruption, inadequate provision of quality social services and the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic. These are all performance indicators (Covid being a temporary one) that speak to the lived realities of citizens and through which one can make an assessment of the government of the day. There are other indicators that speak to the respect and practice of tenets of democracy, namely; respect for human rights, separation of

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powers, respect for the rule of law and the constitutional observance of free and fair elections. The former group of indicators are those that an everyday citizen has no choice but to have an opinion on because they are confronted with them every day as opposed to the latter group that tends to be more technical, theoretical and at times not immediately and directly felt on the ground in so far as their state of being.

When speaking of election cycles, it is important that citizens are familiar with promises made by government via election manifesto, so as to be able to better demand accountability, throughout the years of rule. Citizens need to be in a position

"Liberal democratic performance is understood as the delivery of liberal democratic values, and not as regime longevity or government efficacy. Measuring it is a matter of how far liberal democratic governments achieve in practice the values they endorse in principle" (Foweraker & Krznaric, 2000, p. 1)

to interrogate issues and government about all that is owed to them either by promise of party manifesto or general democratic responsibility of a government towards its citizens. With the world having battled the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020, it is important that citizens are also able to contextualize such issues and place them accordingly on the democratic scale of performance. National emergencies usually have costs that were unplanned for and so funds need to be pooled from different priorities and projects to be used in government effort against the problem.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Botswana need to increase their understanding of and participation in their democracy from just voting to also having informed conversations around government performance
- The Covid-19 pandemic showed the need for intentional political will around national prosperity and rebuilding. The government needs to show that its priorities around addressing the effects of the pandemic are informed by the equal consideration of all citizens. A sense of equality increases citizens' compliance towards policies and laws, which enhances democracy.



BOTSWANA'S DEMOCRATIC HISTORY

"The international community has long considered Botswana a success story on the African continent. Since achieving independence in 1966, it has maintained high economic growth, sound fiscal policies, and regular elections, which have fed this image. However, this label of success has led to inadequate questioning of what occurs beneath the façade in Botswana. Inequality, discrimination, the dominance of a single political party, the government's aversion to criticism, and an array of human rights abuses are among the many problems afflicting Botswana. The country has made especially slow progress toward improving many social and cultural rights. Achievements such as Botswana's noteworthy economic growth, political stability, and regular elections often eclipse issues like human rights, which remain on the periphery of most analyses of Botswana. However, human rights issues present a significant threat to Botswana's positive reputation" (Cook & Sarkin, 2012, p. 4)

- Democratic performance of a government needs to be looked at not from a partisan viewpoint but rather each citizen should be capacitated to make assessments of performance, based on their lived realities

The performance of a democratic government should be looked at objectively by citizens without too much partisan influence. The progress of the nation should take precedence over the need to come into power of opposition, and that to retain power for a ruling party.

Recommendations

There needs to be some changes, in the quest to ensuring that Botswana's democracy continues to grow. Partisanship needs to take somewhat of a backseat, in order for objectivity to guide the discussions.

1. In as much as political parties democratically elect their presidents, the same spirit of democracy must be accorded to citizens: The constitution of Botswana needs to be amended to allow for direct election of the president. Considering the extensive executive power wielded by the president in Botswana, it would be a democratic gain for the office to be occupied through direct election.
2. There needs to be education around the separation between democratic good governance and partisan politics. A better understanding of the distinction will enable citizens to detach criticism of government from disloyalty to the party. Democracy thrives in environments that allow for objective conversation and plurality of ideas.

Cited Works

- Cook, A., & Sarkin, J. (2012). Is Botswana the Miracle of Africa? Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Human Rights Versus Economic Development. *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems*, 453-489.
- Foweraker, J., & Krznaric, R. (2000). Measuring Liberal Democratic Performance: an Empirical and Conceptual Critique. *Political Studies*, 759-787.