

Trends and Drivers of Democratic Recession: Implications for Electoral Processes

Outline

- **Conceptual Premise**
 - **Context**
 - **Trends**
 - **Drivers**
 - **Implications for Electoral Processes**
 - **Conclusion**
- 

Conceptual Premise

- Democracy as elections
- Democracy as institutions
- Democracy as development
- Depending on conceptual entry point, analysis of democratic recession and how to reverse it will be slightly different.

Context

- Collapse of the Cold War
- Demise of apartheid
- Part of the Huntingtonian third wave of democratisation
- 1990s uni-polar world order (US as the sole hegemon)
- Western triumphalism
- Unassailability and universalism of liberal democracy and global capitalism

Context

- Fukuyama's books: 'End of History' book (1992) and 'Liberalism and Its Discontents' (2022)
- But in the 2000s, uni-polar world order is replaced by multi-polar international order
- The emergence of new power centers, especially China and later Russia
- Liberal democracy under strains, democracy with adjectives, (p.5)
- The crisis of the 'transition' paradigm and its five assumptions (p.6)
- Three recent reports (IDEA, 2019, Freedom House, 2021 and V-Dem Report, 2021)
- Democratic recession further accentuated by COVID-19 since 2020.

Trends

- Four manifestations/trends:
 - accelerated rate of democratic breakdown (wherein a democracy reverses to autocracy)
 - decline in the quality and/or stability of democracy in large countries and significant ones, which he terms 'swing states'
 - deepening authoritarianism in big democracies and/or significant (swing) states and
 - lack of political will, self-confidence and poor performance by established democracies including the United States of America both at home and abroad in terms of democracy promotion.

Drivers and Causes

- Structural driver
 - Crisis of capitalism and globalisation (1997/98 and 2007/8 financial crises, (p.10)
 - Underdevelopment, poverty, hunger, unemployment, inequality etc
- 4 Superstructural causes
 - Populism
 - War
 - UCG
 - Mismanagement of diversity

Implications for Electoral Processes

- Loss of faith in elections
- This is manifested in declining voter turnout during elections
- This is more so for local government elections in comparison to general elections
- Example of general and local government elections in South Africa below

Voter Turnout: General Elections, RSA

Year	Total No. of Registered Voters	Total No. of Votes Cast	% Voter Turnout
1994	22, 709, 152	19, 726, 610	86.87
1999	18, 172, 751	16, 228, 462	89.28
2004	20, 674, 923	15, 863, 558	76.73
2009	23, 181, 997	17, 919, 966	77.30
2014	25, 388, 082	18, 654, 771	73.48
2019	26, 756, 649	17, 672, 851	66.05

Voter Turnout: Local Government Elections, RSA

Year	Total No. of Registered Voters	Total No. of Votes Cast	% Voter Turnout
1995	17, 782, 694	8, 675, 567	48.79
2000	18, 477, 932	8, 882, 734	48.07
2006	55, 653, 781 (potential)	26, 938, 560	48.40
2011	23, 654, 347	13, 664, 914	48.40
2016	26, 333, 353	15, 290, 820	57.64
2021	26, 204, 579	12, 063, 302	45.86

Implications for Electoral Processes

- Linked to loss of faith in elections, another impact of democratic recession is declining public trust in governance institutions;
- people have progressively lost trust in key elective governance institutions such as the president/prime minister, parliament, judiciary, EMB, the police, political parties etc.
- In contrast, levels of public trust in others such as traditional governance institutions (chiefs/kings), religious organisations and the army are relatively high.
- This is a manifestation of the enfeeblement of state-society social contract which is a direct result of democratic recession.
- The onset of COVID-19 has worsened loss of public trust in governance institutions given that people tended to put the blame of their plight occasioned by lockdowns and states of emergencies/disasters on the doorstep of governments.

Policy Responses

- Addressing the problem of low voter turnout, it is imperative that key stakeholders including EMBs, political parties and civil society organisations engage continuously in civic and voter education. Democracy education should also be blended with peace education because democracy and peace are two sides of the same coin.
- With a view to reversing the worrying trend of dissipating public trust in governance institutions including EMBs, concerted efforts have to be made by key stakeholders including government, civil society organisations and the private sector to revamp a robust state-society social contract predicated on efficient and effective delivery of services to the people.

Policy Responses

- An indispensable key to redeeming representative democracy is primarily by ensuring that governance institutions deliver concrete development outcomes that practically improve the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people.
- Governance should work for the people and not only for the elites as is generally the case currently. To this end, more investment should go into decentralization and devolution of power to communities.
- The enhancement of state effectiveness is key not only for revamping the state-society social contract, but also for recalibrating social cohesion in an effort to reverse democratic

THANK YOU

Dr. Khabele MATLOSA

Former Director

Department of Political Affairs

African Union Commission

Visiting Professor, Centre for African Diplomacy and Leadership

University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Email: Khabelematlosa@rocketmail.com and matlosak@gmail.com