The Influence of Democracy on Socio-Political Justice in South Africa: Issue for Consideration

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Abstract

Democracy is a concept that is mainly considered instrumental to the provision of socio-political justice globally, especially in the African region, where the one-party and military authoritative system of governance was inherited by most of the political leaders as a form of governance. The introduction of a democratic electoral system in the African region is seen as a major paradigm shift for African countries from a one-party and military system to a form of governance in which all citizens are free to participate in the political process. However, it is observed with great concern that most of the countries in the African region are still led by political parties, which traditionally embrace a one-party and military authoritative system form of governance. This paper sought to analyse the influence of democracy on socio-political justice in the context of African countries, particularly South Africa. The study adopted a conceptual approach to analyse the effects of democracy on the provision of socio-political justice as a cornerstone of a democratic society. In the process, the literature has revealed that most African countries, including South Africa, have adopted a democratic electoral system to elect the ruling political party. However, it is observed that the ruling political parties in most African countries, even on the eve of democracy, are still characterised by the elements of one party and a military authoritative system of governance. It is also observed that most ruling political parties often refuse to concede a defeat during democratic elections and are branded with a culture of looting state resources, military conflicts, and loss of lives. This study concludes with the mechanisms that can be applied to promote socio-political justice in the African region.

Keywords: Democracy; Socio-Political Justice; Service Delivery; Challenges; Mechanisms

1. Introduction

Political parties are indispensable for making democracy work and fulfilling their contractual obligations to the people. In the event that the proper conditions for better internal operational and effective operation are found, legal regulation of political parties is of key importance anywhere, especially in the African region. Duverger (2020) explains a political party as a group of persons

organised to acquire and exercise political power. Kura (2017) asserts that the collapse of authoritarian and totalitarian political and economic regimes of eastern and southern Europe in the last decades of the twentieth century and the subsequent spread of neoliberal democracy provided great political momentum in the world of democracy. This political and economic breakthrough was tantamount to a paradigm shift from a one-party and military authoritative to a form of governance in which all citizens are free to participate in the political process. Therefore, this international political development coupled with domestic forces led to the collapse or liquidation of military and authoritarian regimes of one party in African countries.

This notion is supported by Duverger (2020), who points out that political parties originated in their modern form in Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century, along with the electoral and parliamentary systems, whose development reflects the evolution across the globe, including various countries in Africa. Kura (2017) reminds us that the important element in African democratisation was the opening of the political space for the participation of every citizen in the political process. Citizens were relatively free to exercise their political and civic rights. This has led to the provision of a certain degree of social and political justice to citizens, from whom they were barred during one-party and military systems of governance.

Shipalana (2020) concedes that it became apparent that in a democratic society, the delivery of goods and services, for instance, quality healthcare, clean water, and housing should meet the basic needs of all citizens. In this regard, public institutions are required to consider that there is an effective and efficient delivery of services to benefit all citizens. Botha (2004) highlights that one of the key outcomes of governance in democratic societies is that it opens the political space and process and enables the formulation and implementation of more transparent as well as responsive public policies. It is important to note that this outcome is rooted in the variety of participants in the policy process such as legislators, political parties, interest groups from both civil society and the private sector, research organisations, and spheres of government. Lindberg (2006 in Kura, 2017) points out that what was seen as histrionic and obvious about African democratisation, in 2003 it was reported that about 44 of the 48 Sub-Saharan African states have already held their elections, which marked a radical shift from a long period of authoritarian rule to new democratic government. Furthermore, 33 of the 44 countries have already conducted second elections, 20 have completed three consecutive elections, and seven have had four or more consecutive elections.

This reflected a positive response from the African region, which was trapped for more than three decades in a one-party military-official system. In contrast, Kura (2017) posits that, using democratic governance as a yardstick, the worst of the defective democracies is an authoritarian democracy. This raises the question of whether the current situation of democracy in Africa defines what democracy in its sense of meaning stands for. It is worth noting that the transformation of African ruling parties from dominant ruling parties is seen as a complex and unrealistic process. This is manifested through various political strategies such as refusing to concede a defeat in the democratic election, looting of state resources, corruption, and military authority. It is worth noting that this undermines the provision of socio-political justice, which is seen as the cornerstone of democracy. It is on this basis that this article sought to analyse the influence of democracy on socio justice for service delivery imperatives in the context of South Africa.

2. Methodology

The study adopted a conceptual approach to analyse the influence of democracy on socio justice for service delivery essentials in African countries, particularly in South Africa, which gained its democracy with high expectations of addressing the legacy of the past. The article also used journals, books, and materials related to the subject under investigation.

3. Features of Socio-Political Justice

Social justice is a broad term that affects many areas of public policy and administration, including healthcare, gender equality, reproductive rights, education, and employment as well as the right to vote (Lovett, 2016). However, it can be divisive, especially considering conflicting ideas about equality, fairness, and the allocation of limited resources (Pettit, 2012). Pettit (2012) further highlights that advances in equality often disrupt the status quo, which can be a threat to those people or groups in power. As a result, public administrators often must balance the need for social change with the realities of political and economic structures, and then work within the system to improve the aspects of social justice.

Pettit (1987) in Lovett (2016) postulates that the justice of society has two dimensions, namely, social and political. Social justice directs how well people should compare with each other within the basic structure of the society, while political justice is viewed as how far people should share the authority of the basic structure. It is worth noting that both epitomes may be in competition since the democratic society that answers to the ideal of socio-political justice may not endorse an ideal of social justice. This may trigger issues of priority raised by society to resolve conflicting ideals in the provision of social justice. In a democratic society, the government has an obligation to balance these ideals of socio-political justice and to take into consideration various features of socio-political justice as highlighted hereafter.

3.1 Access to basic services

Access to basic services is seen as a fundamental principle of social justice. Unfortunately, in many parts of society, people are observed to have had different levels of access based on factors such as socioeconomic status, education, employment, and environment that are attributed to poverty and inequality in most African countries (Mutyambizi, Mokhele, Ndinda, and Hongoro, 2020). These authors also point out that the provision of basic services in South Africa has been a focus of the government since the transition to democracy in 1994. As a point of departure, the democratically elected government set some social justice targets to be achieved by 2010. Some of these social justices include about 90% of the population's access to water, 69% access to sanitation, 64% access to refuse removal, and 81% access to electricity (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

The Ministry of Human Settlements, among others, responsible for the upgrading of informal settlements, in 2010, committed to supporting the government to ensure that 100% of the population had access to clean water, 92% had access to adequate sanitation, 75% accessed refuse removal, and 92% of the population connected to the electricity grid (Statistics South Africa, 2016). Despite the notable progress made, basic service delivery remained a serious concern. Protests have continued to rise in various parts of the country depicting dissatisfaction with poor service delivery (Mutyambizi et al., 2020). According to the Municipal IQ report of 2004-2016, the number of municipalities with ongoing protests in South Africa and their data shows that between 2004 and 2016 there have been an unprecedented 1225 service delivery protests.

The World Bank Report of 2022 points out that South Africa has made considerable progress in improving the well-being of its citizens since its transition to democracy in 1994, but progress has stagnated in the last decade (2021). The percentage of the population below the upper-middle-income-country poverty line fell from 68% to 56% between 2005 and 2010 but has since trended slightly upward to 57% in 2015 and is projected to have reached 60% in 2020.

The World Bank Report (2022) further indicates that structural challenges and weak growth have undermined progress in reducing poverty, which has been heightened by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Progress in household welfare progress is severely constrained by rising unemployment, which reached an unprecedented 35.3% in the fourth quarter of 2021. The unemployment rate during the same period of the fourth quarter of 2021 was quite high among youth between 15 and 24, at around 66.5%. The question that is continuously asked is whether the ruling party since 1994 has had strategies to turn

this situation around. The recent local municipal elections where the ruling party fell below 50% and lost most of the urban municipalities portrayed a picture of communities that have lost trust in the ruling party mainly due to a lack of access to service delivery imperatives.

Education, for example, is associated with better opportunities for employment, higher-paying jobs, and economic advancement. It follows then that when quality, equitable education is not available, that lack feeds the cycle of unemployment, low-wage occupations, and poverty, limiting access for future generations. By leveling the playing field, we expand the access of underserved communities to resources that affect health, education, and the community.

In broad public policy terms, that could mean offering free public education for everyone, thereby eliminating the financial barriers created by economic disparities in the educational system. We could implement a more equitable distribution of funding for essential resources, improving the quality of education for students in disadvantaged communities.

3.2 Equal Distribution of Resources

The equitable distribution of resources provides equal rights to all sections of society (rich and poor) to access these resources. It prevents the division of society and the accumulation of resources in the hands of a few people. It helps to maintain the continuous flow of resources so that everyone can get their share.

According to the Reconstruction and Development Programme Report (2017), inequality in South Africa has long been recognized as one of the most prominent features of our society. South Africa is consistently ranked as one of the most unequal countries in the world, an empirical fact that has its roots in the history of colonisation and apartheid. In addition to being extremely high, South African inequality appears to be remarkably persistent. Despite many efforts by the government to reduce inequality since our democratic transition in 1994, progress has been limited (RDP, 2017). Francis and Webster (2019) assert that South Africa is seen as a paradox; on the one hand, it is one of the most unequal countries in the world. Half of all South Africans continue to live in poverty, economic growth has stagnated, and inflation remains high, while the unemployment rate continues to climb towards 30%. On the other hand, it has one of the most progressive constitutions in the world, with a bill of rights that foregrounds expanded socioeconomic rights (Francis and Webster, 2019).

Keeton (2014) points out that the reason why inequality is bad, especially when inequality is easily identifiable along racial lines as in South Africa, is that it enables politicians to dodge difficult economic questions and promote seemingly simple solutions to what very complex problems are. Poverty, lack of job creation, and lack of public service delivery can be blamed on inequality rather than policy or political failure. If inequality is the cause of all problems, then the solution to all problems must be to take from the rich and give to the poor. It can then be argued that it is the selfish unwillingness of the rich to share what they have gained at the expense of the poor that holds back economic salvation (Keeton, 2014).

Van der Berg (2010) maintains that the impact of unemployment on income inequality would be quite modest. This is due to the high degree of income inequality within the workplace. The largest cause of income inequality in South Africa lies within the workplace. Therefore, even if all currently unemployed earn the current income of low-skilled workers, the overall income inequality in South Africa will fall only modestly and will still be very high by global standards. Van der Berg (2010) further suggests that the unemployed need to also move into higher-wage jobs for the impact on reducing inequality to be substantial. This need is also supported by the current realities of the South African labour market. A recent study by Statistics South Africa (2017) shows that 76% of the 6.2 million jobs created in South Africa between 1994 and 2004 were skilled or semi-skilled. 2 million skilled jobs were created over this period compared to just 1.4 million low-skilled jobs. Keaton (2019) asserts that South Africa needs to grow faster and generate many more jobs, but without significant structural changes in the economy, a high proportion of these will be skilled and semi-skilled jobs. This author further points out

that to fill these positions, the unemployed and new entrants into the labour force require the necessary skills. These skills are sadly lacking due to South Africa's poorly functioning education system.

To achieve social justice and ensure equal opportunities for success, particularly in a democratic society, it is important to provide equitable resources that focus on the specific needs of communities and the individuals within them. Advocating for justice could mean promoting policies that address systemic barriers.

.3.3 Diversity

Public administrators will be better equipped to craft policies that address all needs when they acknowledge the differences between individuals and groups. To be effective, policy makers must recognize and accept all the factors that create barriers and then work on ways to overcome them. By understanding diversity and embracing cultural differences, we expand opportunities and access. We can improve access to healthcare by increasing diversity among administrators and requiring written resources in multiple languages. We can reduce employment discrimination by implementing policies that bar it when it is based on race, gender, gender identity, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, age, physical ability and a host of other human traits.

3.4 Community Participation

Social justice requires that individuals have the opportunity and platform to participate in the formulation of policies that affect their well-being. Even well-meaning public administrators can create exclusionary policies when they fail to bring diverse voices to the table. Policies are often created by a select group of people in powerful government positions. Public administrators can prevent this by carefully considering who will be part of the decision-making process, purposely inviting advocates for groups not adequately represented, and encouraging them to apply for long-term and permanent positions.

3.5 Human Rights

Human rights and social justice are inevitably interconnected and therefore it is impossible to have one without the other. According to the United Nations Charter of 1945, human rights are considered rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. These rights are also observed to include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to work and education. The United Nations Charter (1945) also points out that everyone is entitled to access these rights without any form of discrimination. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 provides that South Africa is one sovereign, democratic state founded on the following values: human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.

Human rights as one of the characteristics of social justice, Foster and Harris (2005) highlight that human rights are viewed from three dimensions. First, civil and political rights, which protect individuals from the infringements of governments, organisations or other people. Second, socioeconomic and cultural rights, which include the right to education, housing, and satisfactory living conditions. Third, solidarity rights, which recognise the importance of equality and non-discrimination. However, in most developing countries such as South Africa, inequality is seen as a major challenge, where most people are still poverty-stricken. Nweke (2020) argues that the presence and existence of poverty bring about the denial of access to basic opportunities and amenities, including education, quality healthcare, satisfactory housing, access to potable water, and the privilege of enjoying decent living conditions.

According to the People's Movement for Human Rights Education, poverty is considered a violation of human rights. It is observed that every citizen has the human right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, food, clothing, housing, medical care, and social services. Nweke (2020) further states that poverty must be viewed as the deprivation of basic capabilities and not just an issue related to insufficient earnings, which are commonly considered the major index used to identify

poverty, even though it is understandable that inadequacy of income is a reason for poverty which cannot be ignored.

4. Challenges of Socio-Political Justice in South Africa

Müller (2021) identified South Africa's social and political challenges that exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities. The challenges are the divided African National Congress (ANC) Covid-19 restrictions and the rampant social discontent. They are discussed in detail as follows:

4.1 The ANC: More Divided than Ever

Müller (2022) accentuates that the ANC was internally fragmented to a great extent even before the last elections. There have always been political splinter groups in the history of the part, most recently in 2013, after the former chairman of the ANC Youth League Julius Malema announced his departure to form the EFF. However, conflicts within the party are now being waged very openly and with a willingness to use political violence. This internal cleavage reduces not only the cohesion of the party, but also the capacity of President Cyril Ramaphosa to act. Between 9 July and 18 July 2021, protests flared up in two provinces Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal which were accompanied by massive violence, the destruction of key infrastructures such as factories and warehouses, and pillaging. Three hundred and forty-two lives (342) were lost, and three thousand four hundred (3400) were arrested for involvement in the riots. The South African government estimated the economic damage at 35 (35) to 50 (50) billion rand, which is an additional financial burden for the country's already hard-hit economy. The unrest escalated immediately after the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma, who since 2018 has been defending himself against the charge of state capture before South Africa's courts. State capture in the South Africa case can be defined as the efforts of a small number of people aiming to benefit from the illicit provision of private gains to public officials to profit from the workings of a government. The events of July 2021 have dampened any hopes for Cyril Ramaphosa's strategy of reforming the ANC through the prosecution of Jacob Zuma under civil law for state capture. The network of Zuma supporters in the ANC and other political institutions continues to be more powerful. Therefore, it is unlikely that Ramaphosa would risk splitting from the Zuma faction within the ANC; the fear of losing political power restrains him.

4.2 Covid-19 Restrictions Reinforce Socioeconomic Inequalities

Müller (2021) further avows that South Africa, which was in an economic crisis even before Covid-19, was among the hardest hit countries by the pandemic in 2020. The government of Pretoria responded with one of the strictest lockdowns in the world. This had an impact on those doing informal or precarious work who had little or no savings and were unable to compensate for the lockdown-related collapse in income. From early 2019 to late 2021, unemployment continued to rise: from 29% in the fourth quarter of 2019 to 34.4 in the fourth quarter of 2021. Social inequality has become more marked during the Covid pandemic. Inflation has also increased, leading the South African government in September 2021 to raise the "national food poverty line" from 585 to 624 per month.

4.3 Rampant Social Discontent

The country and its economy also face massive difficulties with electricity supplies, which are linked to the crisis in the parastatal energy provider Eskom. This crisis is the result of state capture, corruption, and consequently poor decisions made in the planning of the energy infrastructure of South Africa, which is still based primarily on coal electricity generated. In January 2020 Ramaphosa appointed a new Eskom CEO, Andre de Ruyter, who is driving the fight against corruption and for transparent processes within the company. DE Ruyter is also more open than the previous Eskom management to diversification of the country's energy supply in the sense of reducing its dependence on coal. However, this will not solve the big and massive problems of energy anytime soon. Eskom is currently not able to

ensure the base load of South Africa or cover its electricity needs. As a result, there are several power cuts a day. Planned power cuts called 'load-shedding' are announced in advance, but unplanned short-term power cuts occur more and more frequently. Along the electricity sector, another infrastructure in South Africa is also considered dysfunctional, for instance, its water supply and rail network (Müller,2021).

Govender (2016) asserts that the democratic experience for most South Africans is poverty, unemployment and exclusion. In 1998, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki famously claimed a "two-nation" thesis, one white and prosperous and the other black and poor. The contribution is sharpened by the relative economic growth experienced during the first decade of democracy, yet worsening inequality of incomes persists in current-day South Africa. The World Development Report OF 2006 states that South Africa's income inequality is the highest in the world. The report graphically opens with the hypothetical birth of two South African children on the same day in 2000. Nthabiseng is a black girl child born to a poor family in a rural area. Pieter is a white boy child born to a wealthy family in the city of Cape Town. The contrasts and respective life experiences are starkly apparent in family histories, levels of education, life expectancy, development of human potential, access to financial instruments, and income generation possibilities. The contradiction is most pointed out later when Nthabiseng has the vote and thus indirectly influences public policy, but she still suffers from the legacy of apartheid's unequal access to opportunities and political power. It is said that the road to a fundamental change in economic and social conditions is very long. The continuity of South Africa's deep social and economic crisis is well known and extensively documented.

Govender (2016) further avers that the features of poverty and inequality are complex, multidimensional, and deeply embedded across the generations. The social costs of poverty are evident in the poor quality of life of children, youth, the elderly and rural women. Poverty poses real threats to the pursuit of social cohesion and development. Increasing violence and crime are attributed to poverty, as is a social choice.

Masipa (2018) encapsulates that there is a consensus among academic practitioners, politicians, and the public in general that South Africa's socioeconomic challenges of unemployment, poverty, and inequality stem from structural and systematic disparities that are a legacy of colonialism and apartheid. Socioeconomic inequalities are the primary source of social division in South Africa. Since the adoption of the 'ready to govern' policy document in 1992, the ANC-led government has introduced extensive policy reforms to transform South African society. These include policies such as the Reconstruction Development Programme (RDP), Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy, Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and the recently developed National Development Plan. However, the transitional phase to a democratic state brought together a formidable challenge to transform both the state and society. The quest to transform society was first captured in the RDP. The RDP was designed to improve the well-being of society through infrastructural investment programmes.

Habiyarembe, King and Tregenna (2022) assert that the South African economy is unique, and its structure continues to be shaped by the country's colonial and apartheid legacy. The stubbornly low rate of economic growth continues to compound the 'triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment in the country while transforming the economy and increasing the rate of economic growth. To date, developmental progress has been uneven across all dimensions of the socioeconomic landscape, and new ideas are needed to deliver transformative outcomes. Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) have a central role to play in addressing the multiple challenges the country faces and in enabling meaningful socioeconomic progress.

5. *The Mechanisms That Possibly Address Socio-Economic Inequalities in South Africa*

Habiyarembe, King, and Tregenna (2022) opine that innovation is one of the best mechanisms to address socio-economic challenges in South Africa. They further accentuate that innovation, or the process of applying new knowledge or knowledge combinations to create new or improved products, new

processes or production methods, new ways of doing things or breaking into new markets, is inherent in economic activities and is a critical driver of dynamism. Innovation has become an indispensable driver of economic dynamism and competitiveness. Through its capacity to disrupt markets by rendering old technologies obsolete and continuously creating new ones, innovation is at the heart of industrial mutation and that defines long-term growth trajectories. Although the role of innovation in the dynamics of economic growth seems firmly established, much less attention has been paid to its role in economic development. In contrast to growth, which focuses on the expansion of production irrespective of who benefits from it, development is concerned more with its effects on human freedoms and the removal of constraints and deprivations that prevent people from leading dignified lives that they reason to live.

Habiyarembe et al., (2022) further posits that in the context of South Africa, the accumulation of human capabilities projected by the NDP forms key input for the reinforcement of the innovation system, which in turn catalyses innovation as a key enabler for development through its effects on creative destruction. Due to the key role that the National Development Plan assigns to STI in reaching its 2030 vision, the 2019 White Paper on Science, Technology and Innovation, as approved by the government, provides a strategic policy framework to build the necessary capabilities and use policy instruments to harness the power of innovation to tackle socioeconomic challenges. The commitment of the government to increase the funding of the innovation ecosystem and to reach the goal of the total expenditure on research and development of 1.5 of the country 's GDP is a further indication of the government's determination to harness the power of innovation to expand the state's capacity to meet the socio-economic challenges of the nation.

Govender (2016) asserts that inequality matters require serious social policy interventions. It is evident that economic growth leads to increased inequalities. Rich people save more than poor people, so inequality aids the process of capital accumulation. In Latin America, inequality has declined due to government policy intervention and government-led programs. If these are the goalposts for transformation, what then are the possibilities for the real elimination of inequality in South Africa? For inequalities to be eradicated, the following questions must be answered by the government:

- How can we overcome the continued reproduction of high levels of inequalities or opportunities?

- How to maximize the scope for redistributive policies not only to ameliorate inequality but also to act as an investment in unlocking economic development and growth?

- How to address the underlying structural issues that contribute to the reproduction of inequality, including the structures of ownership, the sectoral composition of the economy, and spatial inequality to unlock employment growth?

The decentralization of services is considered another mechanism to address inequality. Mbate (2017) opines that decentralization increases responsiveness, meaning that when government functions are decentralized, the needs of the people are immediately adhered to. The theory is suitable for service delivery because public officials serve as accounting officers to the people; they represent the people, which means that there should be direct communication between the two parties.

The main supporting argument for decentralization is to create an efficient administration, prioritize the rights of citizens, and refine local development.

Maluka, Diale & Moeti (2014) avert that most African countries had decentralized their functions from the national to the local level to ensure the soundness of good governance in their constituencies.

Conclusion

The study gave an exposition of the features of socio-political justice. The challenges of socio-political justice, as well as possible mechanisms to ameliorate the current inequalities in South Africa, were discussed in detail. Post-apartheid South Africa has implemented a wide-ranging social grant system to limit the adverse effect of poverty on households and children. Various government programs, including school meal provision, have contributed to reducing the degree of deprivation faced by poor households. Poverty-alleviation policies in South Africa have been effective in limiting the adverse effect of multiple deprivations on households but have been slow in reducing the number and proportion of households exposed to these deprivations. Social inequality is a serious feature in the structure and precarious ordering of South African society. Income-related inequality associated with ownership of capital and other assets, lack of access to opportunities, services, and benefits, and individualized inequality is endemic. Children, youth and women, and people in rural areas are most at risk. South African needs to improve the efficiency of the public service; bring more of the poor into the social security net, re-examine work, remuneration, and the structure of the labour market; intensify education and training; radicalize the ownership of land issue; and upscale development programmes.

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