

The Balancing Act Between Elections Manifesto and The Service Delivery Realities: Public Trust at The Crossroads

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Abstract

Elections are about political plan to drive people-centered aspiration. These aspirations provide basis for political parties to develop a manifesto to embrace electioneering. While it is observed that often community quarrel about local government that does not rise to the occasion after the elections. This phenomenon contributed to shift in electoral support generally and created risk to South African manuring democracy. The paper intends to relook at the outcomes of party manifesto system relating to the existing trust decline in the local government elections broadly. This would assist to examine the hypothesis that public trust on the existing political system declined due to lack of “checks and balance” of service delivery persistent decline. The paper is qualitative literature review that analysis desktop observed local government failures and loss of electoral support. The special attention is given to conceptualise *inter alia*: - policy perspective; ideological context; service delivery outcomes; credibility of leadership; participatory democracy and accountability. Conclusion and recommendations are drawn to reconfigure the political system towards building people-centered service delivery outcomes projected through party manifesto.

Keywords: *Political trust, Participatory democracy, Policy perspective; Service delivery; and Leadership*

Introduction

The study of elections manifesto and realities of service delivery collapse paint a picture of a political system that is on the knife verge. Anzia (2021) suggests that political party ideological context is themed to influence the policy position expressed in a form of elections manifesto. Managa (2012) noted that elections manifestos have over time created a mismatch on the ground on the basis that politicians created a culture of making temporary promises with a false intention to satisfy voters during each new election campaign, which always raised empty community expectations. Da Cruz and Marques (2014) noted that measuring the performance of local government institutions is a complex exercise. However, utilisation of elections manifesto is a strategy to establish faith in which political parties set goals for gunning for electoral support for local government. The perceptions regarding municipalities engagement with local dwellers on service delivery is often found to be weak for instilling public confidence and trust (Vivier & Wentzel, 2013). Administrative innovative strategies to change enshrined in the elections manifesto are always stands to improve the quality of public service delivery which satisfaction of citizens improve trust in local government (Van de Walle, Kampen, Bouckaert & Maddens, 2002). In this regard, the literature reviewed is intended to focus on service delivery and elections manifesto

of political parties to generically explain the “balancing act”.

While it is observed that service delivery in local government is persistently “*hitting the snag*”, it is explained in the context of the politicians misusing of power for personal gratification (Waite & Allen, 2003). Additionally, Riyadi (2020) noted a persistent culture of abuse of power in local government institutions is always up against conflicts of interest that created patronage and clientelism which ultimately stifling service delivery. It is in this context that I argue that the envisaged local government was not envisaged to be engulfed by these unpleasant pictures that suggested that institutions of democracy and under siege. This paper is a qualitative literature review and adapted desktop observation to deconstruct a journey of local government from elections manifesto to the actual outcomes of service delivery. The paper’s conclusion intended to provide recommendations that could improve several issues that are found problematic to attain developmental local government objectives.

Rational and Motivation

Developing ethical justification for local government functions and structures ability to service citizens is a critical scholarship review of public administrations (Chandler, 2010). On the other hand, Durose and Lowndes (2010) suggested that scientific study assisted to navigate the effectiveness and efficiency of the intentions of institutional existence. A scientific study is a mirror for evolving experience of citizens on how their institutions of democracy are performing, and it is in this context that the study performs “checks and balances” of service delivery and pitfalls of a political system of local government.

Theoretical Framework

Lederman and Lederman (2015) suggested that theoretical framework is the philosophical underpinning of a body of knowledge that provide an orientation for any research study. A theoretical framework represents an intellectual structure that provide directions to research study and guide the data to test a philosophical ground of the study relevance through scientific evidence (Troudi, 2014). The focus in this regard was given to social theory to reflect on the social nature of elections manifesto and actual service delivery that is observed to be at the crossroads.

Social Theory

The concept of social theory assisted to shape the structural social relations between two components that are subject of action and benefit (Coleman, 1986). Shilling (2012) suggested that social theory dictated that social life is strengthened through evolving concerns of citizens at the point where evidence is creating a tipping point implication emerged as a call for concern observed by ordinary citizen. While on the other hand, social theory prescribed that local government have a social responsibility to its community through public service delivery to meet its constitutional obligations (Eriksson & Svensson, 2015). It is in this context that social theory is applied to assess the social phenomenon of party elections goals setting and the actual outcomes of service delivery that defined the social contract between local government and citizens.

Literature Review

Policy Implications on Electoral Support

The influence of policy perspective is a fundamental appeal by any political party to gain electoral support. Bøggild (2016) suggests that deepening of democracy is through electorate exercising their fundamental choice of candidates based on their policy perspective that are ideologically influenced and grounded. This is mainly based on the policy latent to grow electoral support where direct democracy is entrenched by citizens' policy expectations that are created (Hawkins, 2011). While the review of scholarship dictated that the synchrony of voting behaviour and election outcomes are strategies invested during the policy enactment phase (Percival, 2004). On the other hand, Fowler (2013) taught us that apart from plethora of studies on voting, there is little evidence linking voter turnout to tangible outcomes to fulfill the interest of the electorates.

Adams, Clark, Ezrow and Glasgow (2004) study was an interesting scholarship review to establish whether political parties reflect on their policy trajectories to respond to the possible shifts in public opinion, and past election results. Schumacher, De Vries and Vis (2013) explained that in every election, political parties evaluate and adapt their policy position as a result of playing an environmental incentive. Tavits (2007) posited that discovering how electorate react to policy shifts is an exciting not because of party strategies but shift to what resonate with the citizen choice. The political posture in the late 1990s established evidence-based approach to measure policy and practice against public services which espoused from a critical scholarship review of developmental local government implemented through government policy (Packwood, 2002). This phenomenon is noted as an inculcation of creating balancing act to try gaining more support in every election, however observed to be obscured in meeting the fundamental objectives expected by electorate.

It is in this context that one is convinced that electoral support is a consequence of policy implications which manifest from the principles of policy for electioneering. It is worth noting that countries ruled by dictatorship have attempted to introduce compulsory voting as a push back mechanism to respond to declining electorate (Fowler, 2013). It is arguable that there is compelling evidence that political parties often get draped into power of rhetoric to establish policy unsustainable regimes, unrealistic solutions, and promote such policies to ordinary citizens (Asen, 2010). The paper notes that the policy has implication to shape electoral trust that translated into the people-centered service delivery enshrine in the manifesto of any political party to articulate a realistic local government programme.

Political Ideology Underpinning Electoral Manifesto

Martin (2015) suggested that political ideology is best understood as an influencer theoretical bond of the actors' proposition translated into political relook through the glance. The concepts of a societal discourse regarding approach to life emerge as part of a theory or ideology which is used as an imaginative way of grasping and interpreting the kind of society (Trew, 2018). Carver (2019) underscored that the historic evolution of ideology has transcended from varies trajectories since it was coined in the late eighteenth century in the political arena of ideas. The concept of

ideology was first established and used by an aristocrat by the name of Antoine Destutt De Tracy during the post-revolutionary France. It is worth noting that ideology is as old as a man, and it is used to philosophies the world's affairs (Mollanazar & Fuladi, 2021). On the other hand, what turned to be problematic is a mirror of ideology as an art and scientific tool of analysis where conceptual reality is shrinking the theoretical truth (Hauser, 2018).

Barber and Pope (2019) opined that the existing conundrum always remained whether a party versus ideology is expressed in political and policy opinions in which citizens' opinions are based on ideological convictions. The paper note that ideology is a constant social construct that influence the behaviour of voters followed by track record of foregrounding people-centered service delivery. Ideology as a concept remained constantly problematic to reconcile with empirical evidence on political knowledge and belief system of any political party, for instance, political ideologies are formal systemic existence of a political thought process (Feldman, 2013).

Mpehle (2012) asserts that local government is organised through ideological context that is legitimised by elected representatives influenced by a party manifesto as a supreme legitimacy translated into a system government plan. Mashamaite (2014) notes that citizen's expectations are the improved socio-economic conditions to foreground public services that eradicate poverty, provision of descent housing, job creation, better health services, better education and general improvement in the quality of community lives. These basic services may have been seen difficult for local government that render manifesto for party election an "elephant in the room". This phenomenon reflects the recent trends and developments in local government that mirrors the larger political and socio-economic challenges that are shaping South African society (Powell, 2012; Reddy, 2016). It is in this context that political ideology, elections manifesto and local government service delivery are integrated concepts that built public confidence and political system of elections.

Analysis of Service Delivery Decline

There is an overabundance of research that always revealed that the growing community restlessness related to basic local government service delivery is escalating at a faster pace, for instance in South Africa (Masiya, Davids & Mangai, 2019). Managa (2012) suggested that there is an escalating service-delivery gap between the urban and rural municipalities, particularly in the former homeland territories and currently in some parts of Limpopo, Eastern Cape and North West, as well as Kwa-Zulu Natal. It is in this regard that the outcomes of local government service delivery in South African context has been constantly under scrutiny, particularly with the 2016 municipal elections (Ndevu & Muller, 2017), and there was still no notable improvement building up to the 2021 local government elections. Seethal (2012) explained to us that political party manifesto is premised on creating employment opportunities, and broaden access to municipal services, promote community participation and establish an accountable and effective local government. It is in this context that service delivery fall on the sought amid the people's plan crafted in the form of party manifesto.

In assessing the impact of service delivery obligational decline, Lufunyo (2013)

opined that often political parties abuse power by simply failing their constitutional obligations that promote human rights through pitfalls of service delivery. Sebake (2020) underscored that local government is responsible for ensuring service delivery capable to promote the dignity of the citizenry, however, the emerging regime of challenges compromised progressive people-centered service delivery. Abidin and Singaravelloo (2018) posited that any government that acceded to build public confidence should undertake service delivery as breaking ground to fulfill constitutional obligation and loyalty as important mediator for public trust in local government service delivery. The paper noted the significant shift on the demand for service delivery growth more than supply because of local government institutions are engulfed in corruption. Sebake and Sebola (2014) suggested that there is a significant growing element of corruption that are being institutionalised by local government which undermined the needs of the ordinary citizens, the poor and the downtrodden. It is in this regard that I conceded to the fact that elections manifesto is a simple wish list and it must be treated as such based of service delivery persistence decline.

Credibility of Leadership and Party Choice

Leadership represented a fundamental evolving human experience that processes the aspirations of a group, political party and citizens generally to achieve predetermined desired collective objectives (Jimoh, Olayide & Saheed, 2012). Political parties always portray itself for putting forward leaders that have demonstrated good behavior and undertook action to promote ethics, inclusive visionary leadership (Huberts, 2014; Downe, Cowell & Morgan, 2016). This was often postured in the manifestos such as observed Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF); African National Congress (ANC); Democratic Alliance (DA) etc.¹ Credible leaders are strategic human machinery for a developmental local government, which Kolzow (2014) observed that they often appear to be an endangered species due to the institutionalised system of corruption and distortion of public interest for private gain in an unsavory manner. Widilestariningtyas (2018) argued that local governments require elected leaders that are competent and have integrity standing within the community with a great supports for achievement of quality service delivery. Stahl, Pless and Maak (2013) stressed the necessity for local government to have qualities of elected leaders that understand the importance of serving with honesty and integrity. I chose to demonstrate a critical analysis of credibility of leadership and local government leaders below on how its plays out in local government.

Local Government Corruption

Masters and Graycar (2016) noted that corruption in local government is as old as a man and has persisted to undermine institutions of democracy. This was debated to demonstrate that the people's expectations postured in the elections manifesto for electing a political party of integrity get caged by institutionalised rot of governance ills (Sebake, 2020). Additionally, corruption is persistently the biggest challenge that constrained local government from contributing significantly to the development of ordinary citizens through service delivery as promised in every election (Ejue & Madubueze, 2014; Mathebula & Makamu). On the other hand, Kayode, Adagba and

Anyio (2013) admitted that corruption is without shadow of doubt, a greater setback for any nation building efforts and it continue to paralyze service delivery and public confidence of the political system of local government globally. It is in this regard that I am convinced that corruption compromises service delivery and local government institutions of democracy where trust deficit is observed by ordinary citizens. It is in this notion that the midpoint between political party manifesto and service delivery displayed a mismatch and rhetorical dilemma of democratic local government in South Africa.

Abuse of People-Centered Power

Power plays out as an ability to influence others, which French and Raven theorized power with an attempt to display how leaders use it to influence other (Lunenburg, 2012). Angoff, Duncan, Roxas and Hansen (2016) noted that in the classical description of conceptual relations, the concept of “power” rather than “abuse” to highlight that citizens reaction can shape local government as an institution of democracy. One is content that the power is conceptually in the hands of the citizens given to the elected local government leaders to drive, which ultimately became a misused instrument of democracy. It is often that misuse power in local government like any other sphere of government is emerging through corrupt tendencies. In this instance, corruption is related to the abuse of entrusted power for personal gratification, which played out in the relationship between management and political spaces (Mathebula & Makamu, 2014; Transparency International, 2011; Zyglidopoulos, 2016). It is in this context that diverting formal benefits of the citizens to cronies in the observed eyes of the citizens have created mistrust on any political party manifesto as simply raiding citizens’ daylight.

Persistent Culture Clientelism and Patronage

Tracing the culture of clientelism and patronage, scholars noted that these are conceptual mass mobilization interlinked through political tactical expression through socioeconomic platforms that emerged in post-independence period in the 1950s and 1960s (de Elvira, Laura, Christoph & Weipert-Fenner, 2018; Mathebula & Sebola, 2020). On the other hand, Anciano (2018) suggested that clientelism is a process of frequent engagement between the local government institutions and the society through a political system of support exchanged through economic interventions. I noted that patronage represented material resource, distributed for particularistic benefit for political support purposes derived from public purse. While it represented as well a political chain of control playing out in the overall space of governance (Hutchcroft, 2014; Mathebula, 2020). In the in-depth of rethinking clientelism and patronage, I am convinced that the actions from these concepts are an antithesis of the mismatch between the elections manifesto and the actual outcomes of the governance ills that compromises good governance that played out in service delivery spaces.

Participatory Democracy and Accountability

Gaventa (2001) argued that the concept participation was commonly and largely used to deconstruct the discourse of development that embrace the wishes of ordinary citizens. The dawn of 1960s created participatory democracy as the people-centered

discourse which was fundamental for decision-making processes in active sectors of the public service (Bherer, Dufour & Montambeault, 2016). Establishing participatory democracy represented the intention to decentralize governance to the community to embed local government service delivery in the people's interest (Patsias, Latendresse & Bherer, 2013). It is in this context that linking citizen participation of local government to the grassroots enhanced service delivery as a fundamental strategy to grow the maturity of democracy in between elections (Gaventa, 2001). Additionally, the notion of public participation created a solid ground to advance participatory democracy which is a guarantee for establishment of relationship between local government and citizens (Sebake, 2016). In this regard, I am convinced that participatory democracy heighten accountability which provide basis for enduring public trust and confidence in local governance (Sebake, 2016).

Methodology

Snyder (2019) noted that establishing research based on the existing knowledge represented building block for the evolution of a critical scholarship review that deconstruct the nature of a phenomenon. Opoku, Ahmed and Akotia (2016) suggested that the choice of adequate research methodology remained most difficult and confusing for most of the researchers. This research intended to adopt the qualitative nature through literature review and imperatives of lived experience in the areas of balancing act between the elections manifesto and realities of service delivery. In this regard, qualitative research constituted a type of social action that emphasised on the uncovering the people's interpretation related to their experiences and social reality (Mohajan, 2018).

Research Design

Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2018) argued that research design constituted a critical concept which is fundamental in science and social disciplines given its ability to systematically map-up a research study. The conceptualisation of research design should guarantee a simple systemic structure of an integrated approach of a qualitative study to arrive at logical conclusive research results (Dannels, 2018). This research study is intended to rely on literature review using critical desktop to uncover the balancing act between elections manifesto and actual lived experience of the citizens.

Data Collection and Analysis

Meyer and Nelson (2020) underscored that data collection is used as a research approach which researcher adapt in understanding the kind of data suitable to be collected and analysed. In the area of determining the type of research, it is always necessary to determine the right methodologies which are underpinned by data-collection methods to be used (Opoku, Ahmed & Akotia, 2016). The kind of data to be collected is through desktop observed outcomes of service delivery and governance that is always postured in political party election manifestos.

Discussions and Findings

Ayee (2016) noted that there is an ongoing review of scholarly discourse around factors that influence electoral outcomes and behaviour of polls globally. Dolezal, Ennsner-Jedenastik, Müller and Winkler (2016) suggested that a new agenda setting used through party manifestos is postured as benefit to the citizens by positioning political

parties to advance their perspective through setting a mood and tone for election campaigns. The conceptual understanding of elections manifesto is an instrument to set the tone for political parties to gain electorate support. It is interesting on how these manifestos suggest doing for the communities. Nkomo (2017) explained to us that in the interest of displaying discontent by citizens around how municipalities were being managed, 76% of those who indicated discontent with how local government institutions were managed reported their discontents once, including 43% which did so several occasions. This picture reflects poor governance and administration of service delivery which is contributing to the mismatch between what political parties promise electorates. Masuku and Jili (2019) posited that appalling service delivery at local government level is apportioned to politicisation of management of municipalities which collapsed public governance. It is noted that the collapsed service delivery is a failure of comprehension of implementation of service delivery administration. Shen and Lin (2012) proposed that the observed reports of *political interference can best be explained on* how political meddling suppresses administrative justice and ultimately the performance of local government. It is in this regard that I presented a broad argument that this situation has not being postured by the election manifestos as setting of agenda for a new transition to local government elections, which made elections manifesto to be a political myth. The evidence to this is apportioned to massive corruption and abuse of power which was also not articulated by most ideologies and policy perspective that influenced election manifesto of various political parties.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study of elections manifesto is a critical review of scholarship of public administration on the basis that it reassesses the instruments and evolution of achieving the objectives of developmental local government. Lessons demonstrated by the paper uncovered that citizens have noted that they are languishing in the political system that have postured a dictatorship of no alternative. The above notion is based on the facts presented that the lived experience of ordinary citizens has not improved much given the collapse of service delivery enshrined in the election manifesto. It is easier to note that there is no match on what was premised local government and actual outcome of service delivery in South African local government. For instance, promised leadership of honesty and integrity is inculcating slower than growing scourges of systemic corruption, clientelism and patronage. All these elements cased local government decline of voter by approximately 2million voters in 2021 as compared to 2016. This is a reflection that citizens are begging to lose faith in the political system of local government caused by ever increasing promises that are not fulfilled. The above paves for a conclusion to relook at the social phenomenon of local government cited through the below recommendations.

- Citizens must start looking at the political parties based on their track record of service delivery and good governance.
- Local government system must be redefined to give more power to the community to easily withdraw any elected local government leader who prioritize party

mandate and deviate from that of the community.

- Local government must legislate and implement performance management system for the elected councillor and the criteria must be clear to the public and not based on any political will.

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