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Intrinsic or Instrumental: How should we Measure the Support for Democracy in Namibia?

Lesley Blaauw¹

This paper argues that the notion of liberal democracy is inadequate in explaining the challenges faced by the Namibian government in its attempts to consolidate democracy. The ostensible contention is that political freedoms gained, such as free elections, a respect for human rights and equality before the law, *inter alia*, are intrinsic elements crucial for endowing the political regime in Namibia with the indispensable quality of political legitimacy. For democracy to become truly consolidated in the country, however, these intrinsic elements of democracy need to be complemented with an instrumental component. Simply put, political freedoms need to be supported by the effectiveness of government at economic delivery. Ultimately, this paper postulates that people measure their support and satisfaction with democracy holistically, hence the distinction between economic and political support becomes blurred.

Introduction: Conventional Conceptions of Democracy

The notion democracy is socially constructed, because although we may be able to agree broadly on the elements that constitute the concept, we cannot expect to reach agreement on its meaning and proper application. As such, the concept invariably is a contested one, because it involves ongoing social and political processes, which aim to maintain political rights, but at the same time improve economic well-being. The latter is necessary because economic inequalities and severe poverty may also threaten democracy and as such its consolidation. The most basic requirement for a country to be considered a democracy is that citizens be empowered to choose and remove leaders. Thus, democracy is defined as a form of political regime in which citizens choose in competitive elections, the occupants of top political office. Such a conception of democracy is, however, minimalistic. Writing on Africa in general, Wiseman (1999) asserts that a minimalist conception of democracy makes allowance for the introduction of democratic constitutions, the formation of political parties, a relatively free media and the conducted of elections in a climate that can be described as relative free and fair. While these values are of critical importance for the transition to democracy, it is insufficient for its sustenance.

By and large, there are generally competing understandings of the concept democracy. This paper will, however, focus on two types of definitions often invoked when reference is made to debate on democracy in Africa in general. Given the fact that the conception of democracy on the continent is often reduced to electoral democracies², a good entry point would be to define embedded liberal democracy. Embedded liberal

¹ Dr Blaauw teaches international relations and international politics at the University of Namibia. He can be contacted at lblaauw@unam.na. The opinions expressed in this paper are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the IPPR.

² Wolfgang Merkel asserts that: "Electoral democracy merely entails that the elections of the ruling elite be based on the formal, universal right to vote, such that elections are general, free and regular." (2004:34). The problem with this conceptualisation of democracy is that the notion of fairness of democratic elections are difficult to ascertain. Hence, the term electoral democracy is not particularly analytically useful.

democracy as the defining element of electoral democracy consists of five partial regimes: “a democratic electoral regime, political rights of participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and the guarantee that effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives.” (Merkel, 2004:36). This definition of democracy refers to its intrinsic or political value. Such a conception of democracy is, however, insufficient in a number of respects. For instance, the political rights of participation cannot produce political equality in the face of extreme socio-economic inequality. An unequal distribution of economic resources has a negative impact on democracy, because it puts the poor at a disadvantage in the exercise of their civil and political rights. In this equation, the definition of democracy does not bring into relief a fair distribution of economic goods or social justice. As a normative project thus, the ‘democratic deficit’ of this definition of democracy lies in its inability to ‘deliver’ economic and social requisites. Thus, for democracy to become embedded in the lives of ordinary people, it will have to be broadened to meet the basic needs of people. In other words, we need an instrumental understanding of the notion democracy.

To cater for this instrumental understanding of democracy, the notion of social democracy is of particular relevance. Thus, for democracy to be successful, it needs to address the vexing question of economic justice. Simply put, democracy as a developmental ideology needs to provide for people’s basic needs such as access to food, housing, medical care and a clean environment. Ake argues that: “... for African democracy to be relevant and sustainable it will have to be radically different from liberal democracy... it will have to de-emphasize abstract political rights and stress concrete economic rights, because the demand for democracy in Africa draws much of its impetus from the prevailing economic conditions within. Ordinary Africans do not separate political democracy from economic democracy or for that matter from economic-well-being” (1993:241). This implies that: “Democracy is depicted as a distributive socio-economic order and among its substantive benefits are growing economic growth, socio-economic equity, and the provision of public services” (Keulder, 2002:5). In other words, the value of democracy is seen to be instrumental, because it concerns itself with, amongst others, issues such as the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of living standards. This reinforces the social right of democracy, namely, the right to physical well-being.

To achieve the above, political freedoms need to be supported by the effectiveness of government at economic delivery. Van de Walle posits that: “... strong economic performance facilitates peaceful movement toward greater democracy” (2002:75; also see, Bratton and Mattes, 2001:451). Moreover, strong economic performance also increases regime legitimacy and contributes to political stability. This reinforces the argument: “... that successful development depends on a political and institutional environment that aligns the political incentives facing governments with the requirements of economic growth and improved social welfare” (Alence, 2004:166). A threat to sustainable human development, on the contrary, might occur: “... where governments’ incentives are at odds with developmental imperatives, policymaking and implementation are vulnerable to economically damaging opportunism.” (ibid.). This suggests that a broader definition of democracy should cater for both intrinsic and instrumental values. To achieve this, emphasis should not only be placed on the enjoyment of civil liberties, but the state will have to take on a particular developmental posture.

The resolution of the above seemingly mutually exclusive projects has profound implications for the prospects of consolidating democracy in Namibia. Resolving the discourse surrounding the intrinsic versus instrumental value of democracy requires first and foremost posing and answering the question: What does the notion of democracy mean for ordinary Namibians, and how does this correspond with the literature review.

Meaning of Democracy in Namibia

A literature review on the conception of democracy in Namibia reveals a common thread: that the edifice of Namibia’s democracy is underpinned by liberal precepts (Good, 2001 Tsie, 2001, Southall, 2003). As such, democracy is most commonly associated with procedures to guarantee political competition and political participation. Schmitter and Karl conceptualise democracy which cater for the above as: “... a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.” (1996:50; Huntington, 1991:7). This definition suggests that democracy as a process finds expression in electoral politics. Bratton



and Matters remind us that: “Democracy... is a system of rules and procedures by which leaders, groups and parties compete for power, and in which free and equal people elect representatives to make binding decisions” (2001:451). State legitimacy, in this trajectory, depends on the consent of the governed. The above suggests that the most basic requirement for democracy in Namibia is that citizens be empowered to choose and remove leaders. This represents the most common tenet upon which liberal democracy is premised.

Ake maintains that: “Liberal democracy is markedly different from democracy even though it has significant affinities to it, for example, in the notion of government by the consent of the governed, formal political equality, inalienable human rights including the right to political participation, accountability of power to the governed and the rule of law... liberal democracy focuses on the individual whose claims are ultimately placed above the collectivity” (2003: 10). This conforms to a minimalist conception of democracy and posits that the edifice of democracy is premised on rather fragile structures of democracy, such as free elections, multi-partyism and civil liberties. From this reading, the conception of democracy focuses on democratic equality of people. The future consolidation of democracy is thus viewed through an emphasis on the procedural and regulatory aspects of the conduct of elections.

Although the above definitions differ in scope and content, they are all underpinned by a common thread: “Democracy is a form of regime whose legitimacy derives from the principle of popular sovereignty: Namely, that ordinary citizens are equally endowed with the right and ability to govern themselves” (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997:10-11). The above illustrates that the conception and practice of democracy has a strong political component. What is lacking, as yet, is the realization that attributing positive meaning to democracy also requires an economic content. The support for democracy in the above scenario is, arguably, premised on an appreciation of political freedoms and equal rights that democracy embodies in Namibia. The meaning of democracy is thus reduced to how well and frequently elections are conducted. Political competition through the conducted of elections, therefore, endows the Namibian government with a high degree of political legitimacy.

This high degree of political legitimacy is reinforced by the views that ordinary Namibians have of the notion democracy. Successive surveys reveal that the meaning of democracy among ordinary citizens is based on an appreciation of civil liberties. A survey published (Keulder, 2002) reveals that 21 percent of respondents interviewed did not know the meaning of democracy. The same survey also suggests that the most common meaning attached to the concept deals with freedom of speech (19 percent). These findings are in line with a recent survey (Bratton and Cho, 2006) which shows that for most respondents in 2000 (67 percent) and 2005 (50 percent), the notion of democracy is invariably associated with civil and political rights. The meaning of democracy thus refers to a range of attributes that inform political practise. The above posits that the meaning of democracy in Namibia is couched within a specific social and historical context. This suggests that the meaning of democracy for Namibians is based on its intrinsic value. The exclusionary nature of colonial rule in Namibia means that most of the country’s citizens conceived of democracy as ostensibly procedural. This means that the meaning of democracy is inextricably bounded to the country’s colonial context. A preliminary conclusion, thus, is that both the literature review and the perception of ordinary citizens point to an intrinsic understanding of the notion democracy.

But, post-colonial politics and the meaning of democracy in Namibia should not be reduced to the elections and freedom of speech, amongst other, civil liberties. Procedural politics embedded in regular elections are critical, but procedural arrangements are not sufficient to conduct politics along democratic lines. This is because even: “Liberal democracy... connects processes of participation and contestation to a particular kind of economy and a preferred state structure.”³ (Joseph, 1997:374). There is thus scope for continuous contestation as we each advance reasons for our preferred conception, meaning and applications of democracy. The argument here is that if democracy is to be consolidated in Namibia, social delivery also needs to enjoy primary priority.

³ In instrumental terms, therefore, a fair distribution of economic resources of society: “... create a shield for democracy with regards to the rule of law and participation.” (Merkel, 2004:45).



Henning Melber reminds us of the primacy of the above by pointing out that: "... the anti-colonial movement's proclaimed goals and perspectives were not only about fighting the oppressive and exploitative system of Apartheid colonialism. The liberation struggle was at the same time about creating conditions for a better life after Apartheid- not only in terms of political and human rights but also with regard to the inextricably linked material dimensions to human well being and a decent living of those previously marginalised and excluded from the benefits of wealth created (to a large extent by them)." (2005:306). Not surprisingly, Keulder (2002) notes that Namibians also have an instrumental understanding of democracy informed by, *inter alia*, socio-economic equity and the provision of public services. To illustrate, more than 90 percent of respondents of Keulder's survey viewed basic necessities such as shelter, food and water for everyone, jobs for everyone and equality in education, as important as political goods. This meant that what was required at independence and beyond was a process of socio-economic transformation. Government's ability to meet the social needs of citizens by providing adequate education for its citizens is demonstrated by the funds committed to education. A UNDP reports states that: "Namibia is among the countries in the world that spend the highest share of GDP on public expenditure on education. Since independence, the education sector has consistently received the largest share of the total national budget, currently around 20%, relatively unchanged since 1990/91" (2004:8)⁴. In addition, the Namibian government has made significant strides in its development efforts, such as expanding social services and undertook considerable land distribution. These efforts have a defining role to play in ultimately determining the support for democracy in Namibia and its sustenance.

Support for Democracy in Namibia

A survey conducted by (Keulder, 2002) revealed that the majority (57 per cent) of respondents believed that democracy was preferable to any other kind of government (see also Table 1). Respondents also rejected the concept of one-party rule (37 per cent), military rule (34 per cent) and presidential dictatorship (34 per cent) and believed that the current government should be given time to right the wrongs of the past. The aforementioned is borne out by the degree of economic patience accorded to government by respondents. Bratton & Cho (2006) illustrate that 52 per cent of respondents are willing to endure current hardship for future economic betterment.

Table 1: Support for Democracy (%)

	2000	2002	2003
Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government	57	64	54
In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable to democratic government	12	14	20
For someone like me, a democratic or non- democratic government makes no difference	12	19	20
Don't know	19	3	5
TOTAL	100	100	100

Source: Keulder, C and Wiese, T. 2005. *Democracy without Democrats? Results from the 2003 Afrobarometer Survey in Namibia.* (Afrobarometer Paper no.47). Cape Town: IDASA.

Support for democracy necessarily means that citizens extend legitimacy to an elected government as their preferred political regime. In the case of Namibia, support for democracy is embedded in the country's colonial history. Colonialism created a paradox in Namibia: on the one hand it conferred on the white-minority a democracy, while the majority of the populace was disenfranchised. Michael Bratton and Nicolas Van der Walle assert that in colonial Namibia: "... settlers reproduced functioning democracies within their own microcosmic enclaves, with features like elections, leadership turnover, loyal opposition, independent courts, and some press freedoms, all reserved exclusively for whites. Thus at the same time that they permitted quite far-reaching measures of political competition, these regimes proscribed access to the political process by limiting participation." (1997:81; Bauer, 2001:35; Du Pisani, 2000). What was, therefore, needed in the

⁴ This section of social services enjoyed special attention after independence for historical reasons. Tom Lodge asserts that: "In the northern homeland reserves before independence government services in the 1970s was lower than in relatively much poorer African countries such as Tanzania: in 1975 only 3,645 Africans were enrolled at secondary schools." (1998:27).



aftermath of independence, was to expand the political field, by allowing, in this instance, the majority the opportunity for political participation. The expansion of the political field is provided for in the constitution.

Democracy in Namibia is underpinned by the supremacy of the constitution, the commitment to the rule of law, the separation of powers, and a comprehensive and enforceable Bill of Rights, which contains internationally recognized fundamental human rights and freedoms (Erasmus, 2000). Table 1 illustrates that more than 50 percent of respondents view democracy in Namibia as the best type of government. This support for democracy in the country remains as high as 57 percent as the 2005 survey shows (Bratton and Cho, 2006). By and large, however, the volatility in the support for democracy means that the process of democratic consolidation remains incomplete and fragile. For Keulder and Wiese this unpredictability: "... suggests that a significant proportion of Namibians do not support democracy for its intrinsic value, but rather that their support is more instrumental." (2005:3). This postulate again produces a caveat; a breakdown as to why people support democracy reveals that political goods, rather than economic conditions underpins Namibians preference for democracy.

Support for elements of democracy again illustrates that choosing leaders through free and fair elections (82 percent) and a general preference for democracy (56 percent) (ibid, p4) means that political legitimacy is not under threat. To the contrary, political legitimacy is reinforced by the acceptance and support of democratic rules and institutions. However, the delivery of civil and political rights is not sufficient to sustain the support for democracy or its consolidation. What these variations illustrate is that the Namibian state has to play a more active developmental role⁵. To be sure, democratic gains are more likely to endure where the state plays a developmental role. This means expanding state reach throughout the country. Since independence, the Namibian government has been able to extent social security benefits to all employees, expand the civil service to absorb those that returned from exile into the civil service and has resettled 16 000 families on state-purchased land (Lodge, 1998)⁶. Moreover, it has enacted legislation that eliminated legally sanctioned gender inequalities, such as the Married Persons Equality Act of 1996, maternity leave divorce and abortion, amongst others (Bauer, 2001). The provision of these social rights will most definitely enhance the support for any democratic polity. All these developments have, arguably, a positive impact on the support for democracy in Namibia. However, conditions that may contribute the de-legitimation of the democratic system, and as such on the support for democracy, will have to be addressed.

A UNDP country report for 2004 notes that: "In 2003, one-third of the population was identified as in need of humanitarian food assistance and the most recent figures show that 40% of Namibians are living below the income poverty line" (2004:10; also see NHIES, 2004).

Moreover, the threats to the twin objectives of deepening democracy and achieving sustainable human development in contemporary Namibia (UNDP, 2004:53) are:

- ❖ "The high prevalence of HIV and the multiple impacts of AIDS;
- ❖ Increasing household food insecurity and deepening income poverty and disparities;
- ❖ Weakening capacities for governance and for delivery of social services."

The United Nations Development Programme Report notes that: "HIV/AIDS is increasing the vulnerability of households, eroding institutional capacities and is Namibia's most pressing threat directly to the fulfilment of rights to life and health and indirectly to the status of all human rights in the nation" (2004:54). Other threats to sustainable human development and by extension democracy are increasing household food insecurity and deepening income poverty and disparities. The Report cautions: "... could emerge as a threat to Namibia's

⁵ Conceptually the function of a developmental state is not only one that can foster growth and development, but also: "... one whose ideological underpinnings are developmental and one that seriously attempts to deploy its administrative and political resources to the task of economic development." (Tsie, 2001:65; Ajulu, 2001; Tsie, 1996).

⁶ More recent figures suggest that the government has been able to settle 1160 families on 66 farms (Werner, 2002).



stability, particularly in the light of AIDS-related worsening of poverty and the historically inequitable distribution of land.” Moreover, ensuring that sustainable human development is achieved demands that: “Efforts must be made to increase household income and agricultural productivity within the context of the AIDS-weakened capacities of families, communities and institutions.” (ibid.). This has implication for sustainable human development and could potentially erode democratic gains.

Addressing the above-mentioned problems, will not only increase the support for democracy, but will also increase the Namibian government’s degree of political legitimacy. The question to pose is thus: Can the support for democracy be equated with satisfaction with democracy in Namibia.

Satisfaction with Democracy in Namibia

Table 2: Satisfaction with Democracy

	2000	2002	2005
Overall, how satisfied are you with the way in which democracy works	64	69	69

Bratton, M and Cho, W. 2006. *Where is Africa Going? View from Below: A Compendium of Trends in Public Opinion in 12 African Countries.* (Afrobarometer Paper no.60). Cape Town: IDASA.

Satisfaction with democracy is, arguably, contingent on the promotion of both intrinsic and instrumental values. Simply put, ordinary people will express satisfaction with a government if they view it capable of executing its appointed tasks. For instance, government needs to have the ability to provide adequate public services, but also needs to be capable of protecting both the democratic polity and the physical safety and security of its citizens. The ability of the state to perform these multiple tasks is dependent on the trust that citizens have in government, in other words, confidence in state institutions. This is because institutions shape the goals that political actors pursue. Tom Lodge (1998) postulates that the goals states pursue are in turn influenced by, *inter alia*, social penetration.

Social penetration is intimately related to state reach. State reach in this context is defined as: “... the extent to which a central administrative elite succeeds in incorporating an entire geographical area within territorial boundaries... it is measured... in terms of the presence of an institutional infrastructure of armed outposts, administrative offices, or service centres.” (Bratton, 2004:3). In simple terms, social penetration refers to the ability of these state institutions to link citizens to the state. This not only means that political institutions should be responsive to citizen’s needs, but citizen’s political attitudes should also reflect their trust in government institutions⁷. In Namibia, the perception of government’s capacity to solve problems has shown a slight increase from 24 percent in 2002 to 36 percent in 2003 (Keulder and Wiese, 2005). Overall, however, this low percentage of respondents who express confidence in government institutions, suggests poor levels of satisfaction with the political regime as a whole. This reading represents, however, an incomplete picture of degree of satisfaction that the political regime in Namibia enjoys. What remains critical to measure the satisfaction with the political regime in Namibia is to look at the delivery of political goods.

As illustrated elsewhere, both the understanding and the support for democracy in Namibia is shaped by the extent to which government can guarantee a basket of political commodities. Indeed, in this country, the delivery of political goods is essential for shaping the perception that citizens are satisfied with the political regime as a whole. Satisfaction with democracy in Namibia could be measured by looking at political freedoms, elections and the performance of elected officials. To reinforce the contention that instrumental considerations play a defining role in measuring the support for democracy in Namibia, it is crucial to look at political freedoms. Notable, about the survey results is that: “Most Namibians seem to think that the current regime is better at providing and securing basic political liberties: freedom of speech (92 percent), freedom to join political organisations (92 percent), and freedom to vote (91 percent).” (Keulder and Wiese, 2005:8). These results suggest that Namibians think of government performance first and foremost in political terms. This does

⁷ Satisfaction with democracy is undermined by official corruption. In Namibia, the perception that corruption is increasingly becoming a problem is reflected in the perceived upswing in the levels of corruption since 2000. Survey results show that perceived corruption has increased from 25 percent in 2000, 30 percent in 2002 to 35 percent in 2005 (Bratton and Cho, 2006). While this does not necessarily impact on satisfaction with democracy, it does have a bearing on state legitimacy.



not suggest that instrumental considerations are not important. Indeed, economic growth and improved social welfare have considerable implications for the stability and quality of a democracy. Economic growth and the improvement of social welfare are two of the variables used to explain how satisfied people are with the deliverance of economic goods.

Namibians, according to different survey results have illustrated increased satisfaction with macro-economic results. In 2000, 42 percent of Namibians indicated that they were satisfied with macro-economic conditions in the country (Bratton and Cho, 2006). This level of satisfaction has since risen to 57 percent and 59 percent in 2002 and 2005, respectively (ibid.). These positive ratings of macro-economic conditions are reinforced by the perception and evaluation of the way in which government is managing the economy. Keulder and Wiese's survey results show that to respondents: "The areas in which government's performance is seen to have increased the most from 2002 to 2003 are the following: narrowing the income gaps (7 percent), improving basic health care services (4 percent) and addressing educational needs (4 percent)." (2005:15). The above findings suggest that government has been able to improve its ability on the economic management front, while the provisions of the social sector seem to reinforce the contention that support for democracy is also based on instrumental considerations. Moreover, it also illustrates that satisfaction with democracy, in instrumental terms, is measured ostensibly by referring to the condition of the national economy.

This does not, however, suggest that personal living conditions do not influence people's satisfaction with democracy. The fact that just about 40 percent of respondents indicated that they are fairly happy with their personal living condition (Bratton and Cho, 2006), indicates that the further consolidation of democracy is also contingent on fostering greater economic empowerment of citizens. To further stem already existing social polarization, Namibians need to evolve a system of participatory development. Such modes of development offer two advantages. Firstly, it makes allowance for directly linking development objectives of government with the priorities of ordinary citizens. Secondly, it could potentially promote coherence in the economic development process by generating more support for initiated development projects.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has argued that at face value, intrinsic support for democracy in Namibia superseded instrumental considerations. Indeed, the provision of political goods such as civil liberties, voting rights and equal treatment under the law, influences the perception that citizens are satisfied with democracy. This implies that government performance is invariably measured by the deliverance of political goods. This observation posits that the delivery of political goods is crucial for consolidating democracy in the country. As such, regime legitimation is contingent on performance considerations. The delivery of political goods bears a strong and significant relationship to the popular legitimation of democracy. Simply put, the enjoyment of civil liberties remains a critical determinant of the satisfaction and support for democracy. However, if the postulate holds true that people measure government support holistically, then it is critical that we review economic explanations of satisfaction with democracy as well. Elsewhere, we have illustrated that economic explanations of satisfaction with democracy are generally reduced to the conditions of the national economy. So far, Namibians have a positive outlook on the economy, but the government faces a number of developmental challenges. The developmental project of the Namibian state continues to be undermined by, amongst others, the high prevalence of HIV and the multiple impacts of AIDS; increasing household food insecurity and deepening income poverty and disparities and; weakening capacities for governance and for delivery of social services.

Ultimately, satisfaction with democracy is and should be measured by satisfaction with key aspects of the elected regimes. The above illustrates that support for democracy as a preferred system of government supersedes the express satisfaction with the way it actually works. More fundamentally, it illustrates that intrinsic support for democracy does not necessarily exceed instrumental considerations. This reinforces my contention that government performance is viewed in holistic as opposed to intrinsic or instrumental terms in Namibia.



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