

Communication as a panacea for sustainable democracy and good governance in Africa

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ABSTRACT: Communication is central to sustainable democracy and good governance. It has been observed that the African continent is replete with political instability, occasioned by disruption and erosion of democratic governance and suspension of constitutional order. This has rendered the continent socially, politically and economically unstable. The paper explores the pivotal role of effective communication in fostering sustainable democracy and good governance in Africa. It delves into the intricate dynamics of communication strategies, emphasising their potential as a panacea for addressing challenges prevalent in the region. By drawing on relevant theories, the paper aims to provide insights into how improved communication can contribute in building transparent institutions, engage citizens, and ultimately promote lasting democratic practices and good governance across the African continent. The root cause of this unfortunate situation has been attributed to lack of synergy between communication and elected leaders which has resulted in lack of two-way communication flow between elected leaders and the electorate thus, creating fertile grounds for military intervention in the continent. The recent occurrences in the Niger Republic, Gabon, Sudan, Congo, etc. are practical examples. For the purpose of this study, Nigeria is used as the study area, mixed research approach was adopted in this paper to obtain data. This involves combining both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies which include survey, using questionnaire to gather quantitative data on public perceptions of communication effectiveness, government transparency and democratic processes. Also interviews as means of gathering qualitative data would be employed by engaging key stakeholders such as government officials, media professionals and civil society representatives. This would help to provide insights into their perspectives on the role of communication in democratic processes and governance. Observational research where public events, media coverage and government communication practices to gain real time insights into how communication is influencing democratic processes in governance practice is considered pertinent.

Keywords: Communication, panacea, sustainable democracy, good governance

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INTRODUCTION

A proper understanding of the subject matter requires conceptual clarification of the basic concepts employed so as to enumerate the major issues at stake. Thus, there is need to understand the concepts of democracy and good governance. While the world is luxuriating in democracy and good governance which are highly sought for in modern democracies and governments some African countries are still plunged in the abyss of military dictatorship and unconstitutional governance, thus, rendering the continent retrogressive in the eyes of global community. There is a missing link between the government and the governed which has resulted in lack of synergy between elected leaders and the electorate the border line which is at the root of the problem is lack of two-way communication between the two-way essential ingredients.

Habu (2018, p. 72) reports that Democracy is a system that vests the people with the power not only to be decisive with the decision of their elected officials or leaders, but also to recall them when their activities in office contradict the yearnings and aspirations of those they represent.

Democratic form of government is different from military or totalitarian or fascist system of government which involves competition, political participation and freedom of expression and association. The question is. How well is political participation allowed to thrive in undemocratic settings in Africa? What is the level of participation of the citizenry in affairs that concern their well-being? The foregoing are the ingredients for assessing democracy in contemporary society. Public opinion is crucial in a

democracy and its influence is very vital in a democracy. Government and policy makers use it to test policies and performance in governance. In developed democracies such as the USA and Britain the tenets of modern democracies are observed: there is a smooth working relationship between the legislature and the electorate there is a two-way communication mechanism between the legislature and the executive on one hand, and there exist a standard for assessing political stewardship. For instance, mid-term election in November is used to assess acceptability of the legislature and the executive (the ruling party), and the views of the electorate is clearly demonstrated at the outcome of the elections. The wishes of the electorate are made manifest in the conduct of elections devoid of rigging and other forms of electoral malpractices. Attempt to manipulate the ballot and subvert the wishes of electorate was clearly manifested when two states of the USA rejected former president Donald Trump as a candidate in the 2024 presidential election. In Britain, it is common to see the Prime Minister, leader of government business, voted out as a result of dissatisfaction with performance. This is an acceptable standard for assessing political stewardship at elections. But the reverse is the case in the African continent, typified by Nigeria where elected leaders impose themselves on the electorate through election rigging and other undemocratic methods.

The way to go to ensure effective communication is for African leaders to imbibe modern democratic tenets such as constant feedback mechanisms between the elected leaders and the constituents by way of periodic interface so that welfare issues can be shared between the two parties.

Literature review

What is public opinion?

Public opinion is the aggregation of individual views on an issue of public interest. Citing Cutlip, Center, Brown, Zuro, Aebanu (2014, p. 84) states: Public opinion represents more than a collected views held by a particular category of individuals and reflect a more dynamic process in which ideas are expressed, adjusted and compromised en-route to collective determination of a course of action.

Similarly, Mahmud, Ogruzibe & Ahmade, (2020, p. 89) hold that:

Public opinion is the collection of beliefs, judgments, assessments for news held by majority of citizens about the activities of government, it is indeed that the public thinks or feels about governments proposed policy or action already taken. Public opinion is an expression of interest by the citizenry to participate in governance and it can be determined by several factors, including the

literacy level, form of government and extent of freedom of action or expression by the citizens and the responsiveness (positive or negative) of government to divergent opinions.

The mass media are very vital to the formation and flourishing of public opinion and the result of public opinion would remain covert and the result of public opinion can only be made published through the mass media. The acceptability and popularity of any government depends largely on the public opinion held about it. Public opinion can make or mar an administration, it can influence the electorate to vote for or against an elected government or vote in a newly elected leader at all levels of government.

What is Democracy?

In the contemporary society, democracy has come to be generally accepted as government by the people by elected representatives of the people. In other words, it means government by the representatives of a majority of the people. Democracy is perceived as a phenomenon based on consensus and the liberty to exercise freedom as against arbitrariness. Democracy is the direct opposite of authoritarianism. It is anchored on consensus building, fertilized by individual freedom the hold and express view with little or no restriction within the confine of law. The concept of democracy connotes majority and popular view against majority view. This view is in consonant with Egbon (2001 p. 9) who avers that:

One way, yet of looking at democracy is through a common base of regarding it as a government by the representatives of the people ... it means government by the representatives of a majority of the people and as the people are usually divided among themselves... it may as well be the government of representatives of the majority of the people.

What is paramount in the understanding of democracy as a form of government is that it is predicated in election of officials based on votes cast in the polls. It therefore means that decisions on public issues are determined by majority opinion. The question is: Is the African continent practicing democracy based on the prescribed requirements? It is obvious that the basic ingredients of democracy are lacking in most countries in the continent of Africa? There is of plethora of arbitrariness and blatant disregard for majority of public opinion freely expressed at the polls. The wishes and desires of the people are suppressed by reckless rigging of elections and imposition of unpopular governments. There is lack of transparency and credibility of the electoral process, no wonder, military intervention has become the order of the day. The recent occurrences in Niger Republic and Gabon

where elected presidents were for forcefully replaced and constitutional order suspended are typical manifestations of frustration of the electorate with the so-called representatives of the people. Until elected leaders (representatives) of the people learn to observe the basic tenets of democracy and good governance enduring democracy in the African continent would elude us in our days.

What is good governance?

Ineji, (2020, p. 30), has this to say about good governance:

Good governance can be defined as a situation where the dividends of democracy are evident; where the welfare of the masses is paramount in the agenda of government; where relative peace and security in guaranteed by the power that be; where accountability, transparency responsiveness, public trust and confidence are guaranteed in the affairs of public business; where there is two-way communication between the government and the governed; where individual liberty and freedom of expression luxuriate; where the future of the young generation and sustainable development is guaranteed. These are some of the basic indices of measuring good governance in most climes of developed nations.

It is obvious that absence of the foregoing is responsible for the inability to attain democracy and good governance in the region. There is no effective communication between representatives of the electorate and the electorates. There is no linkage and so the desires of the electorate are not advanced by the leaders. There is no linkage. This is what Ineji (2023, p. 50) calls linkage function. The mass media are able to form together by interpersonal channels different elements of society... Newspapers can also give account of legislature the voters which highlight to their activities in their media reported

Effective communication

Communication is that holds society together and it is crucial in a democracy. Communication is the sharing or exchanging of ideas, opinions, views and other societal concerns between two parties. In this case, it is the exchange of ideas, opinions and political views between the government and the governed (the elected representatives and the electorate). Effective communication is synonymous with effective development communication. There is need for effective development communication for sustainable democratic governance in the African continent. Christopher (2007, p. 83), explains;

Effective development communication has come to make participatory communication in which a given group is part of the decision making process on any development programme being carried out in its interest, part of the execution and an integral elements of its sustainability...

Importance of effective communication in political systems

Communication as a concept is understood from different respective based on orientation and others of the source and receiver. Basically, communication is the sharing of information, sharing of ideas, opinions, attitudes, etc. The end result of communication is the sharing of meaning or the sharing of experience. What then is effective communication? Effective communication is the process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, opinions, knowledge, and data so that the message is received and understood with clarity and purpose. Effective communication brings about satisfaction to both sender and receiver of the message. Effective communication leaves all parties in the communication encounter satisfied and with a feeling of accomplishment. With effective communication, there is no doubt for misunderstanding of messages, which decreases the potential for conflict.

Sustainable Democracy

Taking a beating from Shaw (2022, p. 4) as cited by the Brundland Commission of 1987 which defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their needs, sustainable democracy can therefore be defined as:

Democracy that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs. Sustainable democracy refers to enduring democracy where the tenets of democracy flourish and the dividends of democracy luxuriate in the lives of the citizenry.

Statement of the problem

The African continent is replete with political instability, occasioned by disruption and erosion democratic governance and suspension of constitutional order and this has rendered the continent socially, politically and economically unstable. These have been attributed to lack of pivotal role of effective communication and synergy between the elected representatives and the electorate which has widens the gulf between the government and the governed. This has not gone well in fostering sustainable democracy and good governance in the African continent.

There is a lack of improved communication which can contribute in building transparent institutions, engage the citizenry in meaningful dialogue and ultimately promote lasting democratic practices and good governance across the African continent. The root cause of this unfortunate situation has been attributed to lack of synergy between communication and elected leaders and the electorate thus, creating fertile grounds for military intervention in the continent. In the contemporary landscape of Africa, good governance, the nexus between communication, sustainable democracy and good governance is increasingly becoming a serious challenge. Challenges persist in understanding and implementing effective communication strategies that can serve as a panacea for fostering sustainable democracy and achieving good governance. Issues such as misinformation, limited civil engagement and inadequate communication infrastructure pose serious obstacles to the realization of democratic ideals and efficient governance. In Nigeria for example most government policies are not people friendly and the masses continue to bear the brunt; the editorial of *the punch* newspaper of Friday, January 5, 2023 points this out succinctly thus; It has been a gloomy New Year for most Nigerians, chiefly; the cost of living crisis has pushed millions to the edge of provocation, preventing them from celebrating the traditional festive season. The months-long nationwide cash shortage aggravated by the economic hardship. This paper critically examines these challenges and explores viable solutions through a communication-centred approach.

Theoretical underpinning

To provide theoretical anchor and aid in the understanding of the subject matter, Structural-Functionalism theory and Structural Conflict theory are pertinent and relevant. Herbert Spencer as British of Victorian is regard as the father of structural functionalism. Structural functionalism is a mean-level theory that sees society as an interconnected system with each part having a different function while still working together. Functionalists view society as a system whose part work together to promote solidarity and stability. Examples of structures or institutions include; education system, family, political system, economy, etc. Functionalism, addresses society as a whole in terms of the functions of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institution. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as “means” that works toward the proper functioning of the “body” as a whole.

This theory is relevant to this study because the disruption of democratic processes in the African countries is hinged on the inability of the political leaders to work in harmony with the electorate which means that there is disharmonious relationship between the main political divide of the political systems in African

countries. Structural conflict theory is also pertinent to this study. Structural conflict theory holds that conflict stems from the ways societies are structured and organized. In other words, conflict is a product or outgrowth of the nature of the society is patterned and organized. According to this theory, the society is patterned into two broad categories, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This is a minute entity but exercises more power and influence on the larger category, the proletariat because they constitute the means of production and distribution in the society. The proletariats are the masses who bear the brunt of exploitation, injustice, poverty, diseases, etc. In other words, the masses survive at the mercy of the bourgeoisie.

The proletariat play second fiddle the implication is that economic exclusion, injustice, poverty, diseases, exploitation and other forms of deprivations are the sources of conflict in society. The theory argues that conflicts are predicated on the consequences of exploitation, domination, suppression, oppression, injustice and man inhumanity to man as a whole. As can be argued in this discourse, the relevance of this theory is hinged on the fact that democratic disruption and political instability in Africa is hinged on protest against exploitation of the electorate by the government, poverty and general economic woes burnt by the masses which are product of corruption, lack of transparency and accountability.

Objectives of the Paper

The paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the current state of communication in the context of democracy and governance in Africa.
2. To identify and assess the challenges posed by inadequate communication in delivering sustainable democracy and good governance in Africa.
3. To explore the role of various communication channels in enhancing civil engagement and participatory democracy.
4. To promote effective communication strategies that can serve as a panacea for fostering sustainable democracy and achieving good governance.
5. To examine how cultural diversity and in historical influences in African countries, influence communication strategies in the realm of democracy and good governance.
6. To explore the role of traditional and community-based communication channels in fostering civil engagement and participatory democracy in African countries.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey which used questionnaire to gather quantitative data on public perceptions of communication

effectiveness, government transparency and democratic processes. One hundred (100) copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents to achieve the proposed objectives. From the total number of one hundred respondents (100), 50 was derived from two academic institutions, University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology. As a result of a larger number of academic staff, 30 were picked from University of Calabar, while 20 came from the Cross River University of Technology. The researcher was informed by the knowledge that academics were aware of the daily happenings in political and economic lives of Nigerian masses. The remaining 50 respondents were drawn from media executive (20), Civil Society 20, while 10 respondents represented politicians. This was informed by the fact that these categories are very active and vocal in the economic and political lives of the Nigerian masses. These responses were clearly indicated in the presentation and analysis of data. Respondents were selected based on their knowledge of the political and economic knowledge in Nigeria. They are regarded as stakeholders and opinion holders and influencers in their various domains. Nigeria was selected to represent a typical Africa country where sustainable democracy and good governance can be studied and findings replicated in the entire Africa continent.

RESULTS

Data in (Table 1), indicate that fifty (50) respondents (50%) stated that the nature/pattern of communication flow between government and the electorate is downward, one way or unidirectional twenty-five respondents said it was two-way whereas 25 respondents affirmed it was lopsided. The data in (Table 2) indicate that 23 respondents or 23% said the nature or disposition of most governments in Africa is undemocratic 27 respondents said it was autocratic or dictatorial while 50 respondents said it was democratic and civil. Data in (Table 3) showed that 80 respondents were of the view that inadequate communication poses a challenge to democratic governance while 20 respondents said it does not pose a challenge to democratic governance. Table 4 indicates that 25 respondents agreed that inadequate communication can result in misinformation, 25% said it can bring about misconception of government policies and programmes, 25 respondents said, it can result in disconnection between government and the electorate while 25 respondents affirmed that it can breed negative public opinion.

The data in (Table 5) indicate that 20 respondents each said the mass media and social media should be employed to remedy inadequate communication challenge while 15 and 45 respondents respectively opined that interpersonal and integrated media approach respectively should be employed to provide solution to

the challenge of inadequate communication in African countries. Data in (Table 6) revealed that 30 respondents indicated that the challenge of political communication in Africa is lack of synergy between elected leaders and the electorate; 30 respondents opined that the challenge is lack of participatory communication approach while 40% attributed the challenge to lack of consultation between elected leaders and their constituents.

The data in (Table 7) revealed that 25 respondents attribute the challenges of leadership in African countries to lack of transparency and accountability in the handling of public business, 20 respondents blamed it on bias and imbalance media reportage, 30 blamed it on disregard for democratic tenets while 25 respondents attribute it to lack of strong institutions.

Table 8 showed that some of the challenges of the electoral systems include electoral malpractices (50), connivance between electoral officials and politicians (30%) while pervasion of justice by judicial officials has 20 respondents.

Data in (Table 9) indicate the views of respondents on what role communication channels should play in enhancing participatory democracy in African countries, 40 respondents said there should be advocacy and enlightenment of the public periodically 40 opined for the use of traditional and interpersonal channels while 30 respondents agreed on the use of two-way communication approach and synergy between the leaders and electorate.

Table 10 data indicate that 25 respondents support periodic interface between elected leaders and constituents 40 opined constant feedback mechanism between elected leaders and constituents, whereas, 35 respondents support the view that the society should set acceptable criteria for assessing political stewardship as a remedy for communication strategies for sustainable democracy and good governance in Africa.

The data in (Table 11) show that 40 respondents attributed the influence of cultural diversity and historical influences on communication strategies in democracy and good governance in Africa, 30 respondents attribute it subservience of subjects to traditional rulers while 30 respondents blame historical factors to preservation of sacred traditional social systems in Africa.

Data in (Table 12) show that 25 respondents suggest respect for traditional institutions as a way fostering civil engagement and participatory democracy in Africa, 25 respondents equally suggested the use of interpersonal and interpersonal based community channels while 40 respondents were of the opinion that a mixed media approach should be employed to foster civil engagement and participatory democracy in Africa.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings is based on data presented in (Tables 1-12) as indicated below.

Table 1: Responses on the pattern of communication flow between government and the electorate.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
One way flow	50	50%
Two-way flow	25	25%
Lopsided	25	25%
Total	100	100%

Table 2: The nature of most governments Africa.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Undemocratic	23	23%
Autocratic/ Dictatorial	27	27%
Civil/ Democratic	50	50%
Total	100	100%

Table 3: Challenge posed by inadequate communication in African Countries.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	80	80%
No	20	20%
Total	100	100%

Table 4: Challenge posed by inadequate communication in democratic Governance.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Misinformation	25	25%
Misconception of government	25	25%
Disconnection between government and the electorate	25	25%
Negative public opinion	25	25%
Total	100	100%

Table 5: Remedy to inadequate communication challenge.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
The mass media	20	20%
Social media	20	20%
Interpersonal media	15	15%
Integrated media approach	45	45%
Total	100	100%

Table 6: Challenges of political communication in Africa.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Lack of synergy between elected leaders and electorate	30	30%
Lack of participatory communication approach	30	30%
Lack of consultation between elected leaders and constituents	40	40%
Total	100	100%

The data were obtained from responses from respondents on the twelve items questionnaire administered on relevant respondents.

Data presented in (Table 1) showed that the pattern of communication between government and the electorate

is mostly one-way which does not give room to a two-way communication flow between the government and the electorate, implying that the communication pattern is lopsided. In the same vein, majority of the respondents opined that, most African countries, though wearing the

Table 7: Challenges of leadership in African countries.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Lack of transparency and accountability in public business	25	25%
Bias and imbalance in media reportage	20	20%
Disregard for democratic tenets	30	30%
Lack of strong institutions	25	25%
Total	100	100%

Table 8: Challenges of electoral systems.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Electoral malpractices	50	50%
Connivance between electoral body and politicians	30	30%
Pervasion of justice by judicial officials	20	20%
Total	100	100%

Table 9: The Role of Communication Channels in Enhancing Civil Engagement and Participatory Democracy in African Countries.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Advocacy and engagement of the public periodically	40	40%
Use of traditional and interpersonal channels	30	30%
Two-way communication approach and synergy between elected leaders and electorate	30	30%
Total	100	100%

Table 10: Effective Communication Strategies as a Panacea for Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance in Africa.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Periodic interface between elected leaders and constituents	25	25%
Constant feedback mechanism between elected leaders and constituents	40	40%
Criteria for assessing political stewardship	35	35%
Total	100	100%

toga on democracy, are inclined to autocratic and undemocratic tenets which do not encourage the manifestation of dividends of democracy.

Respondents also indicated that there exists inadequate communication which poses serious challenges to most democratic countries in Africa resulting in misconception of government policies and programmes, disconnection between government and the electorate and negative public opinion about the government.

Majority of respondents suggested an integrated media approach as a remedy to communication challenges to provide an-embracing and result-oriented political communication. It was observed that some political communication challenges constituted serious challenge to democratic governance in African continent. They include, lack of synergy between elected leaders and the electorate, lack of participatory communication and lack of consultation between the government and the electorate.

Challenges of leadership in the African continent were identified by respondents to include lack of transparency

and accountability by political leaders, disregard for democratic tenets and lack of strong institutions, lack of strong support from the media was also identified as a bane of sustainable democracy and good governance.

One of the challenges posed by weak institution is the electoral system which was perceived as fraught with malpractices, which include connivance between electoral officials and politicians and compromise by judicial officials in electoral litigations.

Findings indicate that communication was unidirectional, cosigned, undemocratic and dictatorial. This aligns with the theoretical framework, the structural-functionalism theory which believes that one dysfunctional element in the entire system can bring about negative consequences. Perhaps, it is the lack of proper communication in the context of democracy and good governance that might have encouraged frequent military intervention in the African continent. The views of participants align with those of the respondents.

As regards the views of participants about challenges posed by inadequate communication, it was revealed that most governments in African countries are adverse to

Table 11: Influence of Cultural Diversity and historical Influences on Communication Strategies in Democracy and Good Governance in African Countries.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Autocratic leadership style in traditional African setting	40	40%
Subservience of subjects to traditional rulers	30	30%
Preservation of the sacred traditional social structures in Africa	30	30%
Total	100	100%

Table 12: Traditional, interpersonal and community based communications channels as means of fostering civil engagement and participatory democracy in African Countries.

Items	No. of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Respect for traditional institutions	25	25%
Use of interpersonal channels	25	25%
Use of media mix	40	40%
Total	100	100%

participatory communication and put on the toga of totalitarianism, dictatorship which are bane to democracy and good governance in the African continent.

In another development, participants also aver that inadequate communication poses a challenge to democratic governance in several ways, which include, misinformation, misconception of government policies and programmes, mistrust and suspicion between government and the electorate and negative public opinion by the populace.

Conclusion

The African continent is replete with instability and disruption of democratic governance occasioned by misgovernance, dictatorial tendencies, corruption and high-handedness and insensitivity to the yearnings and aspirations of the electorate by the government which is entrusted with the task of governance. The situation is aggravated by poverty and increasingly wide gulf between the government and the governed. The ugly situation is compounded by lack of two-way communication mechanism between the government and the governed. Elected leaders hardly consult with their constituents on crucial issues that affect the welfare of the people. There is unidirectional pattern of communication which does not engender participatory communication which is the bedrock of democratic governance. No wonder there have been a recurrence of military co-detat and suspension of constitutional order and subsequent imposition of military Marshall in some countries in the continent which has provided fertile grounds for unconstitutional rule in the African continent. Findings revealed that inadequate communication is at the root of the problem. There is lack of synergy between government and the electorate and enduring democratic tenets are pushed to the background whereas undemocratic tenets are promoted to the front burner. Some of the challenges of democratic governance are

attributed to historical legacies and cultural diversity which might have greatly influenced modern democratic governance in the African continent. Africa remains a content of ridicule in the eyes of the international community the remedy lies with the adoption of community-based people-oriented and integrated media approach to come out of the ugly situation we found ourselves.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. In view of the unidirectional and lopsided pattern of communication flow, there is need for African countries to imbibe a two-way communication approach where there is synergy between the government and the governed in the day-to-day activities of public business.
2. To avoid disconnection between the government and the electorate and to engender public understanding of government policies and programmes, there is need for deliberate review by government to avoid negative public opinion of governments of African countries.
3. There use of integrated media approach is highly recommended to redress (lopsided, communication approach to governance).
4. An embracing communication approach to engender participatory democracy and synergy between the government and the electorate is highly solicited on the part of government and the electorate for sustainable democracy and good governance.
5. There is need for African countries to imbibe enduring democratic tenets to guarantee accountability and transparency in governance.
6. There should be constant and regular interface between the elected leaders and the electorate to ascertain political stewardship of the leaders and ensure that the desires of the electorate are in line with those of elected leaders.

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