

Europe's villagers are rioting at the ballot box. Africa's Civic Educators might help

For decades now, Western merchants of democracy in Africa have spent hundreds of millions of dollars across the continent on 'civic education' and 'voter education' programs. These programs, designed by liberal professors at ivy league universities and liberal think-tanks in America as well as by foreign ministries of western European nations, are intended to educate the African on the merits of democracy, especially on how to 'vote wisely,' and the power of the vote in general, on the assumption that the African REALLY doesn't know how to 'do democracy'.

From what is happening in Europe and America of late, however, it appears these preachers of the civic education gospel forgot the good ol' adage that 'Charity begins at home'. From the first Brexit vote in 2016 to Trump's improbable victory, the right-wing resurgences in Germany, Poland, Hungary and recently Boris Johnson's Tories' sweep in the UK, Europe's 'villagers' seem to have either missed this civic education or disregarded its instructions. Otherwise they wouldn't be powering right-wing 'nutjobs' into governments across the continent.

Hillary Clinton calls them deplorables while her liberal snob academic and journalistic buddies call them 'low-information voters.' The East coast-west coast culture in America calls them 'hillbillies' or white trash; country people who are ignorant, stupid, cast their ballot 'emotionally' and are therefore 'beyond redemption.' These villagers are now having their revenge. And Europe's and America's liberal elite are

now crying 'End of Democracy.'

There is an equivalent to this conundrum here in Africa. Our small emerging 'middle class' has a very condescending attitude towards people it calls 'villagers.' This is rich, given that most of Africa is still overwhelmingly rural, with urbanisation only at about 25%. A vast majority of Africans still live in the countryside, so when these clueless Africans speak in such terms they are speaking about their kith and kin in the villages, their parents, siblings and cousins. Most of these 'woke' 'tweeps' (so called because they are mostly vocal on social media) will be the first in their families to go to university, and their middle class bona fides are rather questionable, as what is considered middle class in Africa is very different from what means in America or Europe. (The Africa Development Bank considers anyone who earns between \$2-\$20 a day or \$5,000 a year to be middle class, and 80% of these people either live in South Africa, Egypt, or Morocco. I have [written before](#) how this characterisation, the basis for the defective 'Africa Rising' narrative, was always wrong in its context-free nature). If this 'tweep' has had a chance to get a scholarship from one of these western governments or multilaterals to attend a western university, the bravado they exude is even grander. If they have worked or volunteered at one of the many save the world NGOs in Africa, even better. They've become so indoctrinated into these liberal 'values' that they've become detached from (their otherwise African) reality. They accuse these 'villagers' of taking salt and soap in exchange for their votes, of being purveyors of 'The Patriarchy' and worse.

When Boris Johnson and his Tories won by a landslide last week, the liberal response was, unsurprisingly, predictable: Racists had voted for this horrible man and his party. Johnson had lied to the villagers in the midlands and former Labour strongholds with false promises, like restoring their decimated industrial towns and bringing back their jobs. Like

Trump in the aftermath of 2016, spontaneous street protests erupted in London. The police had to be called in.

I [wrote](#) in this publication only a few months ago that the attempt by the London elite to reverse the first Brexit election result by deploying bureaucratic jigsaw delay tactics would backfire as these same voters would find a way to express their displeasure at the next election. In the article I said:

“A clear majority of British citizens voted to leave the European Union (Brexit) in 2016. But London elite (who hitherto loved democracy) have nullified their vote, because “these ignorant racists, most of them from rural England, know nothing about politics.” Next time these poor folks will elect a Boris Johnson on steroids, a maniac. Imagine if the U.S Congress had refused to certify Trump’s ‘deplorables’-fuelled victory! A civil war would have ensued. Yet this is what British lawmakers are trying to do. The [#Brexit](#) imbroglio, like its Trumpian counterpart, exposes the hypocrisy of western lecturing of Africa on democracy. Brexit, like Trump’s victory, was a pure democratic act. So why don’t they like either? Only Neoliberals get to define democracy, I guess!”

It appears this is exactly what happened in the UK election last week.

If, as the Washington Post has [written](#), the ‘Low Information Voter’ is one who is more likely to respond to emotional appeals about issues such as the economy, immigration, Muslims, race relations and sexism and is one ‘who does not know certain basic facts about government and lack cognition toward tasks that require reasoning and effortful thinking and is, therefore, more likely not to invest the time and resources to evaluate complex issues,’ is this not the kind of voter that needs the Civic Education that western liberal democracy institutes and advocates have been selling to Africans since independence?

Most 'Voter Education pamphlets' meant for Africa and funded by these institutions, from the National Democratic Institute to SIDA, USAID, DANIDA and DFID in their problem statements identify the 'lack of awareness' challenges African voters face as the reason for them to be 'civically aware' and educated on democratic principles and practices. How come these are not being effectively utilised in their home countries? Because, clearly, the current rightward tilt of western democracy isn't what these liberal institutions wanted. What happened?

Maybe this is a lesson to these institutions that sometimes have their own ideas on what is the best for them and deserve the right to determine by themselves what those ideals should be. But these institutions for some reason never trust Africans to be mature enough to make those decisions on their own, and any election that doesn't go their way will be deemed to have been 'neither free or fair' and they will call for sanctions and even removal of leaders elected in such fashion.

These are the double standards of democracy merchants that I always talk about. Only they get to define what democracy is, and any outcome that does not propagate their liberal worldview isn't a function of democracy.

The truth is, when it comes to something as important as choosing a leader, ALL people, including Africans of course, at some level, do involve emotions in their choice at least to a certain extent. Choice is determined by peoples' history, context and experiences. If most British thought getting out of the EU would serve their interests better, it's beyond arrogant to think that they are wrong and ignorant and you know better than they do.

Africans are never given the benefit of the doubt that they can have the self-agency to make informed political decisions on their own, without being manipulated by anyone. Just because some Africans have elected not to resist a certain

leader deemed by the west to be a tyrant doesn't mean they are powerless to do so. Like all matters of choice, it could be that that is what they deem most beneficial to them. Indecision, after all, as the saying goes, is also a decision. Drilling them with endless 'democracy' lecturers may not be in their best interests.

Politicians all over the world are the same. They deploy strategies that appeals to the needs, including emotional ones, of their electorate. When African leaders sound comical or do outlandish things to win votes, it's not because they are stupid. They are appealing to the realistic angels of their voters' nature. When voters behave comically by doing or demanding outlandish things such as selling their vote for a bar of soap or a kilogram of sugar, they are not being stupid. They are playing the game the best way they believe they can, the most beneficial way they think they can play the game. If democracy merchants want to change that, they should address the root causes of such calculus, such genius (call it stupidity at your own peril, because, believe you me, [it isn't](#))

I don't expect these merchants to learn a proper lesson soon, as their liberal puritanism and arrogance won't allow them to. If they were a bit humble though, they would realise that their own constituents in their own backyard in the West either need these civic education lessons probably more than Africans or have ignored them. They would revamp their syllabi regarding the kind of voter education they are drilling into Africans and realise that national interest comes first in most people's self-determination, and work to factor that into their gospels. But because they are heathen, they will continue to suffer post-election stress disorder in the foreseeable future.