

floodgates to corruption in 2001 and Jacob Zuma turned the flood into a tsunami of malfeasance and sleaze.

Leadership is critical everywhere. The fundamental story of South Africa, and of the ANC, is whether it can reestablish a sense of leadership for good and whether its citizens will appreciate the extent to which President Cyril Ramaphosa will be able to steer the ship of South Africa through merciless seas toward shores of effective reconstruction. Lieberman's book touches only indirectly on leadership and alludes only generally to governance. But he does examine several aspects of South Africa's political structure that are often overlooked by other observers and researchers.

Proportional representation and its contribution to South Africa's mature development is one: "I am largely convinced," he writes, "that proportional representation was the best system for South Africa in order to keep all organized interests vested in democratic politics" (pp. 108-109). Lieberman deftly explains the theory behind proportional representation—about how it incentivizes parties over individuals and how doing so provides coherent control of political direction, especially at the beginning of a new government—as in the newly free South Africa. He also makes evident that, as in Europe and Israel, PR permits splintering (if the percentage thresholds are too low) and warns against the potential proliferation of tiny parties built around a dominant individual (as often seen in Italy and Israel). Sometimes the resulting confused coalitions can hardly solve pressing governing needs.

But that is the least of South Africa's problems, especially in relation to PR. In fact, that political party executives and executive committees in South Africa arbitrarily rank parliamentary and local government candidates in order (Mandela on top, Thabo Mbeki next, and so on), members in parliament have little independence. The executive (and the central committee of the ANC) makes every decision and, ordinarily, members have to obey. Being a maverick or thinking and voting independently carries enormous risk. Unfortunately, Lieberman says too little about political participation under PR and of how—despite an immensely liberal constitution—South African interests have been sorely overlooked structurally by the failure of members of parliament to be connected to or responsive to any constituents at all.

Lieberman smartly shows the ideological origins of that constitution; his intellectual history of it is a major, if brief, contribution to an understanding of modern South Africa. He references not only the well-known Freedom Charter of 1955, but also "An African Bill of Rights" of 1923, the African Atlantic Charter of 1943, and the importance constitutionally of the oft-overlooked contents of Mandela's famous speech in Rivonia in 1964. These ideological foundations gave birth to a less ambiguous constitution

than that of the United States (though its writers drew inspiration from our Bill of Rights).

Lieberman notes the importance of Fort Hare University College in educating Mandela, Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, innumerable other freedom-struggle South Africans, and Seretse Khama. But it did not school Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda or Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere (p. 86). Kaunda never went beyond the equivalent of tenth grade in Zambia; Nyerere attended Uganda's Makerere University College and the University of Edinburgh. The book's index is also incomplete.

Such critiques aside, Lieberman's engaging and conversationally written book mixes perceptive political analysis with data from participant observation and focus groups at the micro level. In this welcome sense, it combines scholarship neatly with the best kind of reportage.

### Response to Robert I. Rotberg's Review of *Until We Have Won Our Liberty: South Africa After Apartheid*

doi:10.1017/S1537592723002797

— Evan Lieberman 

I am grateful to Robert Rotberg for his review of *Until We Have Won Our Liberty: South Africa After Apartheid*. Both of our books examine what came after white rule in Southern Africa and seek broader lessons for politics. We both celebrate many post-apartheid triumphs as well as travails, including low economic growth, unemployment, crime, and poor education. And yet Rotberg's review highlights our very different theoretical and empirical perspectives concerning how to describe governance and development outcomes, and the relative influence of institutions versus individuals.

For example, Rotberg chooses to see South Africa from the vantage of Botswana. He says that Botswana's economic performance and bureaucratic professionalism is a model of what South Africa *could* have been. I see only limited value in that comparison: Botswana is a country of less than three million people (South Africa is almost 60 million), almost entirely homogeneous, with no modern history of conflict, and faced nothing akin to apartheid government or a violent reconfiguration of the state.

Relative to scores of other African and upper-middle income countries, on a variety of dimensions, I find that South Africa is more frequently a leader than a laggard. Moreover, a different neighbor—Zimbabwe—provides a more illuminating comparison. Zimbabwe was once beset with its own version of white settler rule, which also ended as a product of political struggle. In the 1990s, many white South Africans predicted that with Black government, their country would "go the way of Zimbabwe," in terms of kleptocracy, tyrannical rule, cessation of the rule of law, and currency collapse. While acknowledging substantial

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corruption in and out of South African government, in no ways has it become Zimbabwe.

Rotberg points out that I refer to Chad and the Central African Republic but does not explain that I do so only to highlight that those are *truly* failed states, and to correct what I view as misleading rhetoric when so many use this label for South Africa. Whatever its problems, to date, South Africa has maintained a relatively stable currency, a national system for social grants, a dense network of excellent roads and airports, strong tax collection, and world class universities. Many governance failures, yes; but a failed state it is not.

In his review, Rotberg emphasizes his preferred focus on leadership. I agree that the virtues and vices of those in leadership positions are consequential. But I remain skeptical of the analytic value of Rotberg's lens. If we only know "good leadership" through evidence of successful outcomes, then the argument is tautological.

In fact, I am more impressed by how existing structures constrain what is possible for chief executives. In my review of Rotberg's book and in my own book, I describe how *ex ante* assessments of leadership potential offer little predictive value concerning outcomes.

To answer Rotberg's question of why citizens express mostly frustration while I highlight a more balanced

picture, I offer a series of hypotheses in Chapter three. First, democratic practice tends to focus on critiques, not celebrations. Second, I discuss a pervasive human tendency towards negativity bias. Finally, I do not expect ordinary citizens to discuss politics in terms of the long *durée* in the face of their own quotidian wants and needs.

I do not argue that all is well in South Africa, but rather that between 1994 and 2019, democratic practice advanced what I call dignified development—a mix of material and human capital gains, alongside more respectful treatment. Nonetheless, recent trends are worrying, and some of my own optimism has dimmed since I submitted my manuscript for publication. Democracy is fragile and sustained shortfalls in power generation, alongside unstable local-level coalitions contribute to a sense of hopelessness for the future. Growing conflict and frustration could unearth the messy-but-peaceful democratic institutions developed over the past three decades.

The upcoming 2024 national and provincial elections provide another opportunity for South African citizens to use their hard-fought rights and responsibilities to demand better government performance and accountability. They will offer more food for thought concerning both the value and durability of democracy.