

Do we expect too much of political leaders today?

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In today's world, most countries adopt a democratic model of governance, whereby the government and political leaders must answer to their citizens. Only a few centuries ago, when the feudal systems and monarchies were still thriving, there was no rule enshrined in law that held a ruler accountable to his people, yet it was a principle that many citizens believed in. This drove them to fight against tyranny for the chance to be heard and to be represented. With the rise of social media like Twitter, ordinary citizens can call out their political leaders in a matter of seconds, whereas before the internet, their voices may have been censored in physical forums of interaction between them and their political leaders. Empowered by these changes, citizens often have rather high standards for their political leaders to meet, in order to gain their approval. Some may argue that citizens expect their leaders to achieve lofty and impossible goals, thus expecting too much from their leaders. However, citizens often only expect what they were promised by these political leaders and by the inherent principles of democracy.

Some may argue that citizens expect their political leaders to achieve lofty goals, placing an unfair pressure on politicians to achieve the impossible, only to end up in disappointment. As a leader of Germany and the leader of the European union, the political expectations of Angela Merkel's two posts are extremely demanding and often at odds. She has to struggle with the expectations of the global community to be able to solve the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe, humanely and passionately, yet the building fear and resentment of her own citizens towards the refugees led her to an impossible conundrum. She is now being forced to choose between the needs of the international community and her own citizens, yet the citizens that elected her still expect her to balance the role of a world leader and the German chancellor. Faced with a herculean task, it is only understandable that she may have disappointed some by signing the deal to relocate the refugees in Europe to Turkey, in order to satisfy the voices of the other EU members as well. However, many activists are holding her responsible for what they perceive as failure to address the refugee crisis humanely. Thus, it seems unfair for political leaders like her to come under fire despite being burdened with the overwhelming expectation to accomplish the impossible.

However, no rational citizen would believe that their political leaders are messiahs blessed with the ability to achieve the impossible. Most citizens do not expect their politicians to miraculously solve such problems; rather, they expect their politicians to attempt to find a solution. In the case of Angela Merkel, her approval ratings in Germany are still rather high as her citizens are impressed by the tenacity she showed in attempting to live up to their expectations. People like leaders who are willing to take action, even if they may not be what they expected. Barack Obama was once faced with the seemingly impossible task of reviving America's dying public healthcare system. While Obamacare may not satisfy everyone, it still satisfied a majority of his citizens who were finally receiving health insurance, as they were happy with her attempt to solve their problems.

It is completely reasonable for citizens to expect their political leaders to deliver upon election promises. In the past, President Nixon became notorious for promising his voters that he would exit the Vietnam war, when in reality he was increasing the aerial attacks in Vietnam. President Nixon's actions of going back on his promise was seen as a betrayal, by his citizens. Things have not really changed much since then, as voters still hold their leaders accountable to delivering what they promised. President Donald Trump promised his electorate many things, most of which he delivered, such as his attempted travel ban, an executive order to pull out of the Transpacific trade partnership and the infamous wall. That can perhaps explain why his staunchly conservative republican voter base

is rather satisfied with his presidency thus far. On the other side of the world, Aung San Suu Kyi's domestic and international approval ratings are in freefall, as she is accused of going back on her promise. Once regarded as the champion for human rights and democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi is now representing a government that is leading the cruel persecution and alleged genocide of the minority Rohingya community in Myanmar. Similar to the case of President Nixon, people are rightfully enraged at this perceived betrayal. Their subsequent disillusionment is made clear by the petition to strip away Aung San Suu Kyi's Nobel Peace prize, as they believe that her betrayal makes her unworthy of the recognition. Clearly, in a democracy that champions representing the interests of citizens, not betraying the trust of voters is certainly not too much to expect from political leaders, which is why outrage at such betrayals seems justified.

It is also not too much to expect transparency and accountability from political leaders voted into power. Any fair and legitimate democracy expects its political leaders to uphold transparency and accountability; thus, it is only reasonable for voters to expect their leaders to own up to their own mistakes rather than deny them. In the case of America, it is only reasonable for citizens to be upset at the Trump administration's failure to comply and cooperate with the FBI's probe into the alleged Russian involvement in the Presidential elections. Instead of being transparent once evidence was released proving collusion between Donald Trump's aides and the Russians, President Trump would rather fire his staff in order to try and deny any involvement. Worse still, President Trump's initial refusal to release his taxes reinforces his reluctance to be transparent with his citizens, thus proving a violation of the most basic expectations that voters have for political leaders. Voters expect transparency and accountability in order to be able to trust the leaders they empower with their votes. As such, it is not too much for voters to demand appropriate punishment when leaders fail to comply with these expectations. While some may argue that political leaders can never be completely transparent with their citizens, due to the fear of undermining national security, as in the case of government surveillance, it still seems reasonable for citizens to demand an explanation when such mass infringements of their privacy come to light.

In conclusion, the only thing that has really changed from the past, is the empowerment of citizens through the introduction of elections, social media and increased political awareness. While this has led to voters holding their politicians to higher standards, it does not necessarily mean that their expectations are unreasonable or unfounded. On the contrary, the expectations of political leaders today still seem to be rather similar to that in the past, whereby in most democracies political leaders are expected not only to represent the interests of the voters, but to also be held accountable for their actions. It is a fundamental expectation of political leaders to be answerable to their citizens, and perhaps even to the rest of the world.

Comments:

The expectations citizens have of politicians was clearly outlined throughout the essay, making the subsequent evaluation of how reasonable these expectations were very clear and well-explained. Examples used were both relevant and comprehensive. However, more analysis could have been given to explain why citizens have these expectations of political leaders. Explaining the underlying importance of accountability and transparency would have made it easier to understand why it is reasonable to have this expectation, reducing the assertiveness of some parts of the essay.

