

Comparative Transitions to Democracy
Masaryk University Brno
Unit I. The Meaning of Democracy

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1.2 The Concept of Democracy



Democracy one of the most used concepts in political science
difficult to imagine someone who has not heard it
google, almost 73 million documents

Paradox, not so easy to reach an agreement on what democracy is

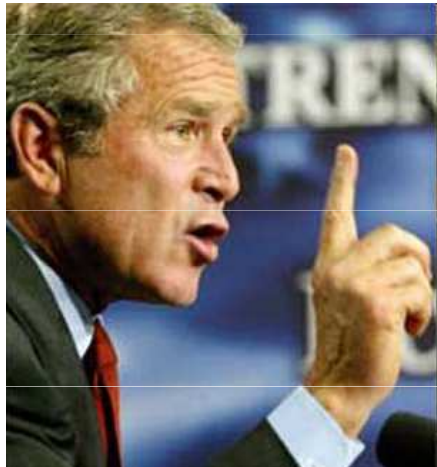
- citizens
- political leaders
- political theorists

everyone knows the meaning
but do we all understand the same?

is there something that we can call DEMOCRACY?

Reasons for differences in understanding

- important ideological load
 - politically biased
 - politically correct, positive concept
 - peoples' democracies
 - liberal democracies
- cultural differences
 - democracy in the world
 - democracy more than a governmental model
- evolution in time
 - democracy today
 - democracy in the past



1.2 Definitions of Democracy

In order to be able to understand ourselves when we talk about democracy
we need to be able to clarify our definition of democracy

need to discuss the same concept

Discarding non-orthodox (biased) definitions of democracy
two main schools

procedural definitions of democracy
substantial definitions of democracy

Democracy, from the Greek *demokratia*
demos, people
kratos, government

Thus, democracy is a form of government based on the rule of the people



are all the “popular governments” democratic?

is the rule of majority, democratic?

Look for the limits of our definition of democracy

political theorists have tried to separate what democracy is from
what democracy is not
complicated task, thin lines

Two main types of definitions

placing the stress on the procedures
forms, institutions, ...
placing the stress on the contents
outputs, policies, ...

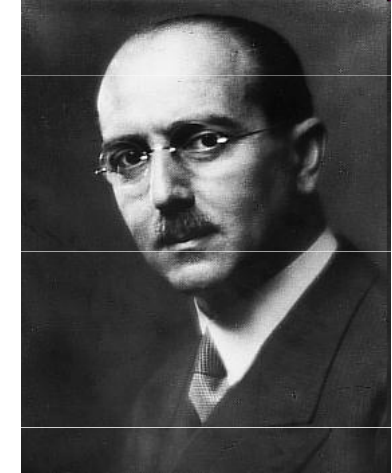
Two main approaches to democracy



1.3 Definitions of Democracy: Procedural Democracy

Approach focused on the study of “how things happen”
analysing the forms
institutions
how policies are decided

What matters is how we take decisions
democracies, people participation
non-democracies, popular participation is limited



Hans Kelsen: ‘Democracy is a form. In fact, the procedure through a social order is searched or undertaken is consider formal to distinguish it from the contents of the order, that is its material or substantial element’

democracy as a method itself

democracy is the method

vs. non-democratic models in which the
procedures are not fixed

But not much explanation of how is that method

Joseph Schumpeter: 'the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's vote'

centrality of the elections

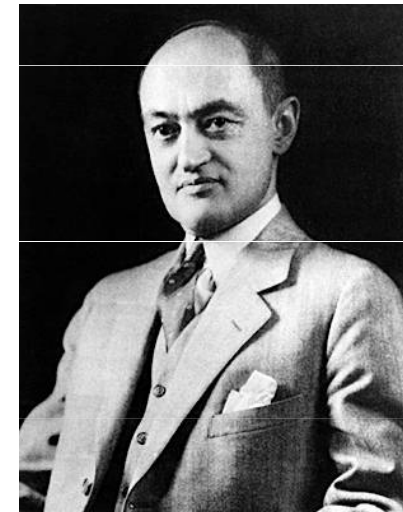
solving conflicts, different interests

but rules

elections = democracy?

competitive?

2 parties at least?



Robert Dahl, definition of poliarchy
setting more guarantees for a real democratic model
Dahl is author in between the two schools
democracy, as an ideal
poliarchy, as a model attainable

Democracy is 'the continuing responsiveness of the government to the citizens, considered as political equals'

Poliarchy is the practical application in human societies of the ideal of democracy

1. Freedom to form and join organisations
2. Freedom of expression
3. Right to vote
4. Eligibility public office
5. Right of political leaders to compete for support
6. Alternative sources of information
7. Fair and free elections
8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes



Advantages of these definitions

measurability

easy to understand, simple definition

Problems

too much weight of electoral aspects

electoral fallacy

illiberal democracies

proto-democracies

no intensity in democracy

democratic or not



1.3 Definitions of Democracy: Substantial Democracy

Democracy is not just a set of procedures
essence of democracy
contents

Democracy not as a system to reach decisions
but a societal model
a way of living, and organising public affairs

Need of contents

democracy as empty shell
needs contents

values, ideals, goals

determining political outputs in that political community

forms+contents



Giovanni Sartori: democracy as an 'ethical-political system'

'What democracy is cannot be separated what from what democracy should be. A democracy exists insofar as its ideas and values bring into being'

The question is, which values?

Norberto Bobbio

Freedom

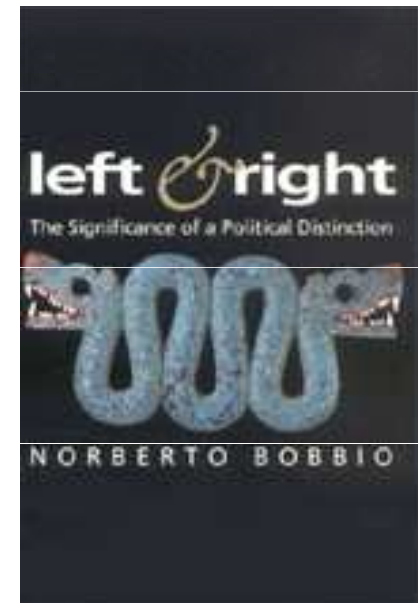
Equality

Advantages of this type of definitions

link institutions practice

graduate democracies

compare models of democracy



Disadvantages

which values?

ordering values

too perfect? can we attain democracy?

frustration



1.4 Defining democracy

So, how can we define democracy
democratic political systems

Procedural aspects

selection of leaders among citizens
eligibility
campaigning
pluralism in the choice

government rule limited
temporal
no concentration

responsiveness

leaders-ruled
channels open
equilibrium

information

plural
alternative



applicability of the norms

universal

rule of law

citizens

leaders

Nature of the political action

Not separated from fundamental values of the society

natural law

guiding principles

freedom and equality

respect for minorities

tolerance

human rights



“Democracy is a model of societal organisation in which decisions are made by a group of leaders with a temporary mandate and selected through competitive elections, that represent and are responsive to the rest of the political community, and whose decisions must be inspired in the foundational principles of that political community: freedom, equality and respect for human rights”

1.5 Evolution of the Democratic Ideals

Traditionally democrats were considered revolutionaries
inverting the political order
hierarchy
leaders-ruled

Enlightenment and liberalism

French and American revolutions (late XVIII Cent.)
new order
democratisation, open participation

Napoleonic reform
not purely a democrat
but consolidating some of the achievements of revolutions
state



Constitutions of the Restoration

Congress of Vienna (1814-5), return to pre-revolutionary order

Royal statutes, limited power of the king
shared sovereignty

Liberal revolutions, 1830s moderate liberalism

liberal elitism

1848 radicalised liberalism

expanding citizenship

workers

social justice



Post-WWI reforms

social protection

expansion citizenship

women

Post-WWII reforms

social protection

minorities, civil rights

1968 and beyond

post-modern democracies

extension of social rights

non-materialist values

environmental rights

multiculturalism

and democracy today?

