Democratic Typology: A Practical Guide

MOSES. M. ADAGBABIRI, PhD
Dept of Political Science
Delta State University
Abraka, Nigeria

Okolie Ugo Chuks
Msc, Cipm, Nim, Icen, Ismn, Ican (In View) Chartered Institute of Personnel Management
Nigeria (Cipm)
Edo State Study Centre

Abstract

The beginning of the idea of democracy is associated with the city-states of ancient Greece. The word itself is derived from the Greek "demokratia", from demos, "the people" and kratos "rule". Greek democracy was direct democracy in which the whole citizen body formed the legislature, and in which the representative system was unknown. This was possible because of limited size of the ancient state, which was generally confined to a city and its rural surroundings. Ancient democracy recognized the equality of citizens, but failed to develop a general conception of the equality of mankind. Greek democracy was a brief historical episode, which had little direct influence on the theory or practice of modern democratic states. From the fall of the Greek City-States to the rise of modern constitutionalism, there is a gap of about 2000years in the theory and practice of democracy. The successor states were tribal or feudal kingdoms which became largely transformed into absolute monarchies. This was the situation down to the time of the decline of colonialism and the rise of nationalism. Democracy is a concept which stirs up different ideas in the minds of many people. Therefore, there is no consensus among scholars on the exact definition of democracy. Thus, theoretically, scholars and international financial institutions like the World Bank have established an inextricable connection between democracy and good governance. Democracy, adequately understood, is a theory that sets some basic principles according to which a good government, whatever its form, must be run (Oluwole, 2003). Democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered; there has been no universally agreed definition of the concept. The question now is: what is the explanation for democratic divergent views and typologies? An attempt to answer this question is what this paper has set out to achieve.

Keywords: Democracy, approaches, types and good governance.

1. Introduction

Democracy has become the most fashionable form of governance in the world. Interestingly, though democracy has been an important feature of modern life, there has been no universally agreed definition of the concept. The Athenians of the ancient Greece defined democracy as the government of the people by the people for the people. This simply means the government people freely put up to serve them without any discrimination on the basis of social status. Euripides, a Greek philosopher long before plato, share the above view when he described a democratic state as one governed by people's representatives and for the many who have neither property nor birth (Sabine and Thorson, 1973:66). Plato, another Greek philosopher, had a similar view of democracy when he defined a democratic state in his book, the Republic, as a state governed by the philosopher kings, who neither marry nor have personal property, but live together in the barracks (that is, equivalent to government house today) and enunciate policies for the general welfare of the people. However, plato, in his second and third books, the statesman and the laws, respectively modified his definition when he defined democracy as the government of the people in which law is supreme, rulers and subjects' alike being subject to it. For Rousseau, democracy is the government of the people for the general will of the people.

To provide the general will of the people, government must give liberty under the law, must create a system of public education by which children are accustomed to regard their individuality only in its relation to the body of the state, Rousseau argues (Sabine & Thorson, 1973:538). In what he described as democratic centralism, Lenin (1983) defines democracy as the government of the peasants and the proliferates, which subordinates the minority to the majority through a strong party structure that cedes its decision making power to higher party bodies. Under this democratic centralism, Lenin argues, no opposition, criticisms and demand for personal liberty are brooked from the people. Despite the seemingly divergent views on democracy, there are some basic principles that are common to them. These include supremacy of the law, equality of all citizens before the law, personal liberty, general will of the people, equitable distribution of resources in the society and equal opportunity for all citizens (Nwekeaku, 2014:38).

For the purpose of this paper, democracy is defined as a system of government in which all qualified adult citizens share the supreme power directly or through their elected representatives. That is, a system of government based on popular consent and whose operations are based on the rule of law. Therefore, democracy specifies who constitutes the legitimate government and wields the authority inherent in the stat (the elected representatives), how they acquire authority (free and fair elections, choice between parties) and how they are to exercise it (in broad harmony with public good) (Parekh, 1993). This makes democracy amenable to moral and ethical justifications or judgements. Hence, good governance forms the philosophical foundation upon which democracy and democratic theories are built (Ogundiya, 2010). Democracy allows the people to choose and reject their leaders and their programmes when such are no longer serving the interest of the people. Despite the seemingly divergent views, democracy with social, economic and political development will engender good governance. Therefore, democracy is regarded as the best form of government that can be adopted in a country.

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Types of democracy refer to kinds of governments or social structures which allow people to participate equally, either directly or indirectly. Democracies can be classified in different ways. However, some scholars discussing democracy have use different approaches which include: The normative, the descriptive, the typological and the dimensional. The normative approach has three strands: the oppositional, the realistic and the perfectionistic. As an oppositional concept, democracy indicates what ought not to be. Realistic normativism point to what could be while perfectionistic or utopian nomativism presents the image of a perfect society that must be. The descriptive emphasizes what democracy is in the real world and therefore focuses on representation, majority rule, opposition, competition, alternative government and control, etc. The approach could be structural, procedural or behavioural. The typological focus involves defining properties that delineate democracies from non-democratic politics. Here democracy can be characterized as the advanced type, the medium or normal type and the minimum standard type. The dimensional approach focuses on microdemocracy and macrodemocracy. Microdemocracy focusing on small communities where direct democracy or direct representation is practiced and macrodemocracy focusing on large collectivities that cannot operate direct face-to-face relationship and therefore practice indirect representative democracy.

On the other hand, direct democracy is a type of democracy where the people govern directly. Athenian democracy refers to a direct democracy developed in ancient times in the Greek City-State of Athens. A popular democracy is a type of direct democracy used on referendums and other devices of empowerment and concretization of popular will while indirect democracy is a representative democracy where the people's representatives hold sovereignty. A liberal democracy is a representative democracy with protection for individual liberty and property by rule of law. In this type of democracy, the citizens through election elect those who will represent and govern the state on their behalf. This type of democracy replaced the direct democracy in modern states, as it is no more possible for everybody to gather in one place in order to take decisions to govern the state because of the large size and population of the modern states. Types of indirect or representative democracy include:

- Electoral democracy – Type of representative democracy based on election, on electoral vote, as modern liberal democracies. Citizens exercise the right to make political decisions, not in person, but through representatives chosen by and responsible to them.
- Dominant-party system democracy – Democratic party system where only one political party can realistically become the government, by itself or in a coalition government.

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- Parliamentary democracy – Democratic system of government where the executive branch of a parliamentary government is typically a cabinet, and headed by a prime minister who is considered the head of government.
- Presidential democracy – Democratic system of government where a head of government is also head of state and leads an executive branch that is separated from the legislative branch.
- Soviet democracy – Form of democracy where the workers of a locality elect recallable representative into organs of power called soviets (councils). The local soviets elect the members of regional soviets who go on to elect higher soviets.
- Totalitarian democracy – System of government in which lawfully elected representatives maintain the integrity of a nation state whose citizens, while granted the right to vote, have little or no participation in the decision – making process of the government.
- Authoritarian Democracy – Is a form democracy where the ruler holds a considerable amount of power, but their rule benefits the people.
- A non-partisan democracy – Is system of representative government or organization such that universal and periodic elections (by secret ballot) take place without reference to political parties.

Other types of democracy include:

- Grassroots Democracy – Emphasizes trust in small-decentralized units at the municipal government level, possibly using urban secession to establish the formal legal authority to make decisions made at this local level binding. It implies that opportunities should be given to people not active in national policies to take part in local affairs even in remote local areas.
- Social or Economic Democracy – This type of democracy tends to minimize social and economic differences, especially differences arising out of the unequal distribution of private property. It is system with emphasis on egalitarian qualities. That is, equal treatment and equal respect for every man.
- Constitutional Democracy – Powers of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee the minority in the enjoyment of certain individual or collective rights. It emphasizes governed by a constitution.
- Bourgeois Democracy – Some Marxists, communists, socialists and anarchists refers to liberal democracy as bourgeois democracy, alleging that ultimately politicians fight only for the rights of the bourgeoisie. This type of democracy posits that capitalists impose their will on the people whose resources they control for their personal gains.
- Delegative Democracy – A form of democratic control whereby voting power is vested in self-selected delegates, rather than elected representatives.
- Deliberative democracy – A form of democracy in which authentic deliberation, not only voting, is central to legitimate decision-making. It adopts elements of both consensus decision-making and majority rule.
- Democratic Centralism – A form of democratic method where members of a political party discuss and debate matters of policy and direction and after the decision is made by majority vote, all members are expected to follow that decision in public.
- Guided Democracy – Is a form of democratic government with increased autocracy where citizens exercise their political rights without meaningfully affecting the government's policies, motives, and goals. In many instances, an educated minority makes use of a mass party to exercise effective control, while elections are held as a mere gesture towards ultimate democratic objects and more as a means of estimating public opinion than as a means by which representatives can be chosen or dismissed.
- Interactive Democracy – Proposed form of democracy utilizing information technology to allow citizens to propose new policies, "second" proposals and vote on the resulting laws (that are refined by parliament) in a referendum.
- Jeffersonian Democracy – Named after American Statesman Thomas Jefferson, who believed in equality of political opportunity (for male citizens), and opposed to privilege, aristocracy and corruption.
- Market Democracy – Another name for democratic capitalism, an economic ideology based on a tripartite arrangement of a market-based economy based predominantly on economic incentives through free markets, a democratic polity and a liberal moral-cultural system which encourages pluralism.
- Multiparty Democracy – Two-party system requires voters to align themselves in large blocs, sometimes so large that they cannot agree on any overarching principles.

- Participatory Democracy – Involves more lay citizen participation in decision-making and offers greater political representation than traditional representative democracy. E.g., wider control of proxies given to representatives by those who get directly involved and actually participate.
- People's Democracy – Multi-class rule in which the proletariat dominates. It emphasizes a system of democracy where government controls most aspect of human life in the interest of the people.
- Pluralist Democracy – Emphasizes the representation of various diversifies interests in the society and cater for same, e.g., trade unions, business corporations, pressure groups as many centers of powers which are consulted.
- Radical Democracy – Type of democracy that focuses on the importance of nurturing and tolerating difference and dissent in decision-making processes.
- Semi-direct Democracy – Representative democracy with instruments, elements and/or features of direct democracy.
- Sociocracy – Democratic system of governance based on consent decision-making, circle organization, and double-linked representation.
- Religious Democracy – Is a form of government where the values of a particular religion have an effect on the laws and rules, often when most of the populations is a member of the religion, such as: (a) Christian Democracy (b) Islamic Democracy (c) Theodemocracy (d) Jewish Democracy etc.
- Workplace Democracy – Refers to the application of democracy to the workplace or within the industrial plant. It calls for direct self government by workers in a plant. That is, workers making decisions, sharing responsibility and authority in the workplace.

Conclusion

From the above, one cannot but agree with Barry Holden that "democracy is a slippery term and its meaning is vague and confused…… the meaning of democracy is therefore not determined simply by the application of the word. Rather the meaning is delineated by the characteristics it connotes". The important thing is that what many of these regimes labeled as democracies lay claims to government being run in the interest of the people whether expressed directly by the people or by their representatives. Whatever its form, democracy sets some basic principles according to which a good government must be run. Democracy can engender good governance in a state provided it is able to achieve the desired end of the state defined in terms of justice, equity, protection of life and property, enhanced participation, preservation of the rule of law and improved living standard of the populace.

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