

Comparison of democracy models



Write an essay that compares and contrasts the different versions of democracy discussed in class (and in Hudson)—protective, developmental, pluralistic, and participatory? Which best describes American politics today? Which is most preferable? Why?

According to William E. Hudson, there are four major models that emerge from modern conceptions of democracy: Protective, Developmental, Pluralistic, and Participatory Democracy. The Protective model advocates democratic institutions because they can provide protection for individual liberties and control of property in a society where people are self-interested and acquisitive. This model will give way to a utilitarian society where there is the greatest good for the greatest number. The Developmental model believes democratic politics is best for allowing all people with “civic virtue” to overcome their selfishness, unlike the Protective model, and promote the well-being of all of society. While the citizens are passive in the Protective model, the Developmental model encourage “good citizen” to actively participation in politics to better themselves and their government.

However, social scientists view the Developmental model as a democratic ideal that is much different from reality. The average citizen are observed to be apathetic and uninformed about politics while only the political elites participate in government. This give rise to the Pluralist model which, like the Protective, sees human nature as inherently selfish and would defer the day-to-day governance to the elites. Pluralists give the leaders of interest groups the role of representing the average citizens in policymaking. Because both models assume that political leaders, the elites, should make most of the decisions, they are labeled the elitist models of democracy.

In response to the Pluralist view, the Participatory model suggests that political apathy is the result of the lack of opportunities for significant participation rather than a natural inclination. People are apathetic because social and political institutions encourage apathy in an authoritarian manner. Much like the Developmental model in many respects, it sees people as capable of civic virtue and encourages active participation in political affairs. The two models differ from each other on their view on economic inequality. The Developmental model does not view this as a barrier, whereas the Participatory focus on the importance of economic equality as a requirement for meaningful political democracy.

American politics today would be best described as a Pluralistic democracy. It has the lowest voter turnout of any democracy. People are clearly apathetic and focused on their private concerns to care about the day-to-day governance. For the most part, politics is the matter of political elites like interest groups each representing its members by lobbying for laws and reform bill. However, this has led to a society ruled by a few elites with the majority of the nation's wealth and have significant leverage in political matters.

A more preferable model to strive for is the Participatory model. Much of the apathy in American politics is due to the notion that the people feel powerless. People feel that their contribution and participate in government will not amount to much. The citizens have no direct say in government with the exception of representative of the House. Every member of the executive and judicial branch as well as the Senate are not directly elected by the people. The complicated system of separation of power and checks

and balances were purposefully designed by the Framers to slow the governing process for the sake of preventing tyranny. Consequently, whether the people participated or not, a policy will still take a tremendous amount of time to go through as the political parties in each governmental branch fight over partisanship rather than the merit of the policy. As explained by proponents of the model, there is also a lack of opportunities for participation especially when people are more and more caught up in their career. The Election Day is arbitrarily put on a Tuesday when, with the exception of a few states, many people have to go to work.

What does the game “ star power” tell us about power? How did the Framers of the Constitution incorporate such ideas into the Constitution?

The Star Power game demonstrate the notion of absolute power corrupts absolutely. The game starts out with a very social atmosphere as the players trade chips with each other. However, when the ability to govern the other groups, and dictate the rules, is given to the “ upper-class” Square group, the atmosphere changed. Inevitably, the Square members, the elites, begin to create oppressive rules that are favorable to them to remain in power and are restricting to the other two groups. Although the other group can suggest rules, the Square have no obligation to adopt any of it unless it is favorable to them. This create a different class system for the participants: those in power and those who are powerless. It is important to note that if any other participant in the lower- and middle-class groups, the Circle and the Triangle, that would be promoted to Square will succumb to the same temptation of infinite power.

Who is Steve Rocco? How did he get elected to school board? What—if anything—does his election say is broken in our political system, and what can be done to fix it?

Steve Rocco is an American who was formerly an elected board member of the Orange Unified School District in Orange in 2004. Strangely enough, despite being elected, nobody seems to know anything about Rocco then. Even the board members and news reporters could not get through to him during his candidacy. He also did not campaign or have a candidate statement, and he was supposedly a teacher according to the candidacy form. However, he managed to win the election against an opponent who actively campaigned. He did not make any public appearance during this period and some people speculated that he would not show up to the board meetings. Rocco did, in fact, show up to meetings with inappropriate speeches and inappropriate behaviors which enraged other members present. A petition to recall him failed to gather enough signatures and he remained on the board.

This event raises several key issues with the political system. First of which is the people's lack of care and involvement in the political system. The fact that Steve Rocco did not campaign or make any public appearance during the candidacy should have raised an alarm. This may be an isolated incident of failure in the system but the root cause is present even in major elections. Most people are already so removed from politics that voter turnout has been on a decline. Those who does cast a ballot in an election often do so based on familiarity of names or other attribute. In the case of presidential election, the large majority vote based on partisanship. That is to say a

person who is affiliated to the Democratic Party will most likely vote for a Democratic candidate.

Further on the topic of voting, smaller elections, like the one that got Steve Rocco elected, are often placed towards end of the very lengthy ballot. Voters suffer from ballot fatigue and will only complete the first part of a ballot. Those who actually do reach the end will often do it with less care assuming they even have a slight notion of what they are voting for. As a case in point, many people said they thought it was more appropriate to vote for Steve Rocco because he claimed to be a teacher as oppose to his opponent who is a park ranger.

Most people would immediately blame the people who voted for Rocco as ignorant among other accusation. The common people are apathetic about participating in the political system except those who have a very large stake in the matter. Although they are not entirely wrong, there are other factors to consider. One issue raised by this event was the failure of watchdog journalism, or any other watchdog organization for that matter. As aforementioned, no one knew a thing about Steve Rocco when he was elected. This is not limited to the common folk of Orange County but also the journalists and reporters. In this case, no matter how involved one may be in the election, there is simply not enough information available to make an informed decision on the matter.

Another issue is how Steve Rocco managed to become a candidate in the first place. Clearly, the requirements for candidacy is not sufficient because it only required the name and occupation of the candidate. What is more

worrying is the fact that Steve Rocco falsely claimed he is a teacher and shows that the people organizing the election never bothered to do a background check on the candidates. There are no quick and easy fix for the political system. To start, the people and organizations involved like the media should have the duty to seek and provide all the relevant information for the people. How can people be expected to make informed decisions when there are no information to seek?

How does the separation of powers, according to Hudson, undermine democracy? Do you think there are too many “ checks” in our system of government? Too few? What types of constitutional reforms does he suggest?

According to Hudson, the founders’ preoccupation with safeguarding liberty caused them to create a system that undermined two other key democratic values. To prevent majority tyranny, they created a structure that lacks responsiveness to political majorities. This is done by putting democratic passions through excessive checks and balances of the separated branches of government. Second, the separation of powers divided responsibility and made it impossible to hold elected officials accountable for their actions. Accountability is crucial to representative democracy especially when the representatives make laws that are not in their constituents’ best interests. This cannot be done when separation of power obscures who is responsible for governmental conduct and inhibit responsiveness to public interests.

What are the pros and cons of having major policy decisions made by majority rule? Do you think the decisions such as whether to build or build an

airport at Toro, go to war in Iraq, or define marriage (Proposition 8) should be made by majority rule? What do Greenberg and Page feel about the capacity of average people to govern themselves? Do you agree or disagree?

Majority rule is one of the key concepts that people associate with the word “democracy” in the United States. The Framers’ concern and fear of majority tyranny was one of the reason for the system separation of powers. They saw the common people as uninformed and lack the knowledge to make the right decision for everyone. The system does not distinguish the tyrannical majorities from those that are not. It simply creates a series of roadblocks which allows the interests of the minority to prevent change that a democratic majority support. A democratic majority rule can be good in distributing the decision-making power to many people who have a stake in the outcome. Essentially, it gives way to change that are beneficial to the largest number of people based on their democratic vote. As people see that they each have the equal power to change their own life and those of others, they will naturally become more attentive to politics and spur discussions that will better society.

Under an autocratic system, the opinion of the majority does not matter as their supreme leader makes all the important decisions and seek only obedience. In a democracy that inhibit majority rule, it is no different. Instead of a single supreme leader, it could be a sufficiently large interest groups funded by wealthy individuals and creates an executive minority rule. Interest groups today like the NRA or AARP are extremely influential in making public policy and are among the biggest lobbies in Washington. Under majority rule, everyone can become part of the decision-making

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process which deter tyrannical rule of the few elites. This is especially true in America as top 20 percent control 80 percent of the wealth, and will continue to stretch their lead by funding political candidates who are willing to represent their interest. For a time leading up to the Iraq War, most people were hesitant to use military force and continued to oppose the war when it began.

Nevertheless, majority rule is not safe from abuse as feared by the Founding Fathers and the Framers of the Constitution. After all, one of the weakness of majority rule is that it does not require a consensus to make a decision. After the September 11th attack, the public was very emotional and supported the war in Afghanistan. Minority racial groups became targets of hostility as a result as well. The issue arise as to whether people should be allowed to make important decisions when they are so easily manipulated by emotion. Moreover, a majority rule does not guarantee the protection against influences from elites. The period known as the Red Scare led to mass hysteria of anti-communist sentiment as a result of Senator McCarthy's speeches.

Although there have been instances of majority tyranny, they are few and far between. Regardless, Greenberg and Page still feels that the average people do not have the capacity to govern themselves. They see that the citizens do not care about politics, are uninformed on most matters, and unstable in their views. As a result, the citizens are not ready for self-governance and should not be allowed to determine what government does. Greenberg and Page also note that, under alternative system from majority rule, the rights of the minorities are also not guaranteed.

Opinion

What aspects of the Constitution inhibit majority rule? Why did the Framers incorporate these constraints into the Constitution?

In the Constitution, the Framers designed a framework for a government of separated powers and checks and balances. The government has its executive, legislative, and judicial powers divided into separate branches, each with a unique set of powers and a role in the affairs of the others. This is to prevent any one branch from becoming too powerful. This system has many potential for conflict between the branches of government. It was intentionally designed this way by the Framers to slow the governing process and inhibit majority rule. Many of them also believed that the people should not rule directly but through multiple layers of elected representatives serving as barriers to majority rule which they thought would lead to bad outcomes. The citizens of the United States have no direct say in government with the exception of electing members of Congress.

The first and most obvious inhibitor on majority rule is the process to elect a president. Every member of the executive and judicial branch are not directly elected by the people. This include the President of the United States who is elected by the Electoral College, not the people. Even if candidates tie in number of votes or fail to receive the majority from the Electoral College the decision will go to the House of Representative. This was seen in the election of John Quincy Adams and George W. Bush where neither win the popular vote but were elected president by the House and the Electoral College, respectively.

Another aspect of the Constitution that inhibit majority rule is the Amendment process which requires a supermajority vote: two thirds from both houses of Congress and three fourths of the state legislatures. It cannot be done by a simple popular majority vote nor does it require a popular vote. This inhibit majority rule because in the case of the Senate and the state legislature, each state is equally represented. This is particularly disproportionate as only a few states like California and Texas already constitute nearly a quarter of the population but only get 5% representation.

The supermajority vote is also present in the checks and balances system. Unlike the prior examples, majority rule of the people and the government can be inhibited by the checks and balances system. Assume that public outcry has managed to influence both houses of Congress to pass a new law. The President have the power to veto the bill, which can be overridden by a two thirds vote in each house and signing it into law. At this point, the Supreme Court can deem the law unconstitutional and overturn the new law, or the president can issue a signing statements saying he cannot carry out the law.

The Framers create a constitution by which the people only rule indirectly and deliberation serves as barriers to majority opinion. The framework of government established by the Framers was designed to inhibit majority rule. Of the three branches of government, they only made a part of one of them, the House of Representative, subject to election from direct vote of the people. It was not until the 17th Amendment that Senators were subjected to election by direct vote. On the topic of Amendments, suffrage was not granted to blacks, women, Native Americans, or 18-year-old until <https://assignbuster.com/comparison-of-democracy-models/>

much later. One reason why it took so long was because the Framers created an amending process that was exceedingly complicated. They designed a system in which political elites are insulated from majority opinion to deliberate on their own.