

Democracy assignment



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Comparative Politics term 3 essay The procedural definition of a democratic system. Otherwise known as the minimalist definition of democracy, focuses on elections as central to democracy. A minimalist definition states that a democracy is a democracy only if political decisions are arrived at given an institutional arrangement whereby individuals gain, by means of open competition, the people's vote to govern them (Dahl, 1971 Dahl (1971) expands this definition by identifying key requirements that he deems as important for democracy.

These requirements amongst others are universal suffrage, free and fair elections that are relatively held frequently, freedom of expression and association where Individuals may form or affiliate themselves with any political establishment and lastly, citizens who wish to run for public office may be afforded that opportunity. This definition includes the basic civil liberties that should, in theory guarantee and ensure that the democratic process is inclusive, free from manipulation and allows citizens to partake In an autonomous and an Informed manner.

This is to say that people have the power to either put official Into office or remove them If their interests are not served and protected by those officials (Tissue, 2008). Contrariwise, there Is a substantive definition of democracy which focuses more on the socio-economic rights of citizens and their participation In politics. It must be clarified however, that substantive democracy does not discard the idea of elections. This definition suggests that a democratic state is a state that is free on all levels, that is from political freedom to economic freedom.

The problem with this definition is that it makes it incredibly difficult to identify democratic countries from the non-enigmatic countries. This is because it is too abstract to be applied in reality as it relies heavily on utopian circumstances which are in a way non-existent. It does not really focus on economic obstacles that hinder countries from fully entrenching socio-economic policies to eliminate political and economic inequalities (Caruthers, 2002).

For this reason, I prefer the minimalist definition of democracy based on three simple reasons. Firstly, it is true that the substantive definition of democracy advocates political participation in democracies. However, it must be noted that voter apathy is a major reality that many democratic countries face and there is no solution if not an immediate solution to this problem and democracy would therefore collapse if we relied more on substance than procedure (Dahl, 1971).

Secondly, by virtue of holding elections in a democracy to place officials in public office, the idea of a representative democracy comes into play whereby people do not have a direct say over matters of governance and this is the only way over which governments can exist to entrench public order within societies since not everyone can be in a position of power. Lastly, the abstract definition of democracy views capitalism as the driving force behind inequality. This is true, however, this definition fails to acknowledge the historical fact that capitalism cannot be reversed and that communism within economies of the 19th century (Tissue, 2008).

Using a minimalist definition to democracy I will compare between South Africa and Brazil as emerging democracies to illustrate procedural democracy in practice. South Africa and Brazil share characteristics that are democratically similar. Here, is a comparison between two robust democracies that are fully consolidated. South Africa and Brazil are similar in terms of structural class and economic policies that outlines substantive possibilities of an ideal state under democratic governance. Both countries are presented with extremely high levels of inequality (Carnival, 2000).

This is however, not due to the incumbent democratic systems but rather due to economic disparities that both these countries inherited on the Journey to independence. All in all, the democratic consolidation in Brazil and South Africa may be emphasized in the following manner; the democratic procedures as well as electoral processes are in full practice in both countries. Parliamentary systems are well accepted in both countries as there are no specific forces arising either from political or social organizations that oppose the legitimacy of such a system.

In both countries you will find relatively committed organizations in protecting the rights of workers and that of ordinary citizens. Since independence both countries held multiple elections that were declared free and fair and have met the basic principles of procedural democracy (Piper, 2009). The rule of law and including Judicial autonomy are important in a democratic system of governance and this includes a constitution that is forceful.

The legal system in South Africa and Brazil has stood the test of time whereby the Judicial processes are not interfered with and the rule of law is solidly applied to all citizens irrespective of race, gender, occupation or even political affiliation. This has been proved by the fact that the former prime minister of Brazil Fernando Collor and the then president of South Africa president Thabo Mbeki were both unseated from their respective positions as heads of state through legal reoccurred (Gummed, 2009).

Distinguished dimensions to accountability in a democracy include social, horizontal and vertical accountability. Social accountability concentrates more on the emergence of socio-economic concerns as well as political concerns that seek to undermine the state of democracy. In terms of social accountability, both Brazil and South Africa need to deal with brewing factionalism as this has the potential to disrupt the democratic system.

It is clear that factionalism has become a problem in Brazil and South Africa since both countries have been experiencing nation-wide strikes lately.

Vertical accountability provides citizens the opportunity to force politicians to account for their shortcomings through elections after a particular period. This is a problem in both countries because it means that political leaders may not be held accountable in certain circumstances for acting irresponsibly during their term in office.

Horizontal accountability refers to mechanisms of accountability put in place by the government in itself, where authorized institutions under state's control oversee and implement redress measures and, if necessary ensures that legal processes are taken to deal with unlawful actions whereby other

state when it comes to horizontal accountability simply because both governments have failed to establish effective institutions with necessary measures to better deal and eradicate with internal problems regarding unlawful practices by state officials on certain state institutions (Gummed, 2009).

I imagine that a scale that measures democracy based on substance would mostly be influenced by economic indicators in terms of policies aimed at addressing poverty and social inequality. This is unfortunate however, because countries do not function in isolation, but rather are members of a global economy. Furthermore, the amount of economic resources that countries have differs from one country to the next. Due to this problem, you would find that one country may be in a far better position to deal with socio economic within a short period of time than others (Caruthers, 2002).

With that being said Brazil and South Africa are not economically worst off as developing countries. Now, let's look at how these two countries have fared economically in the past five years in terms of Growth Domestic Product (GDP) and Human Development Index (HDI). South Africa's GDP averaged at 4.5 percent year-on-year and its HDI 0.72 on global rankings from 2002 to 2008, whilst Brazil's GDP averaged at 4.2 percent year-on-year and its HDI 0.72 in the same time frame as South Africa (BRICKS annual report, 2009).

The stakes so high in both countries in that competitiveness over elections has become hostile and bitter whereby members political parties go as far as killing one another to secure power. This problem has particularly been more visible in South Africa than in Brazil. Also whistle blowers are brutally killed

as a way of stopping them from revealing corruption. The above problems are more visible in South Africa than in Brazil. Therefore, if democracy was to be measured solely on the above then Brazil is clearly more democratic than South Africa.

However this is not a true reflection the democratic process based on procedure and such an analysis is presents difficulties when measuring levels of violence over political power as there is no clear formula that can be used to amylase levels of democracy. And since there are no distinct differences undermining democracy between the two countries that stand out, procedural democracy simplifies this situation gives us a better chance of comparing democracies.