

The Australian political system



Liberal democracy is a conceptual political ideology that combines notions both from democracy and from liberalism. Much is debated on the subject of those two ideologies, but to understand the concepts, they must be firstly properly defined.

Governmental or state affairs, better known as politics, have always been extensively debated. There is a general opinion that a society with a faulty political system is condemned to failure. Politics is more than the voting of laws and handling internal and external affairs. Haywood (2002) states that “politics is inextricably linked to the phenomena of conflict and cooperation”.

There is a generally accepted opinion that politics holds the economic system of a country together, education, health, national defence and ensures the prosperity and well-being of society and its members. History has shown that there have been many forms of country leadership, from absolutism - where one person had supreme and irrefutable power over the entire country, kingdom or empire - to democracy - where the power was given to the people. Each system offered several rights and imposed several obligations from the people, to various degrees.

However, what all political systems have in common is control. People need guidelines in order to live in a society, and that is how laws were born. Many political scientists, among which Samuel Hendel (1909-1984), have defined freedom as being meaningful in an organized society only if regulated by a set of restraints. In other words, we are as free as we prefer to be, as long as our freedom does not restrain the freedom of others. Everyone should be

equally free, and the extent of one's freedom must be established by a non-discriminative, generally applicable legislative system.

Several parties have dominated the political scene in Australia throughout history, and nowadays some people characterize the Australian political system as being a two-party system. Although this statement is still open for debate, the fact remains that Australia's liberal democratic system has become more and more stable over the past decades.

Policy definition

To better understand the meaning of a liberal democracy and the consequences such politics has over society, two main terms must be defined and analysed.

Foremost, a liberal democracy, is a system in which “ democratically based institutions of governance exist alongside liberal conceptions about the rights of individuals” (Parkin, 2002). The two systems must be firstly defined, in order to understand better how they function as a whole.

Democracy has its roots in Ancient Greece and can roughly be translate as ruled by the people. However, this definition is not enough to capture the true meaning of democracy, and its effect upon society. Perhaps a more comprehensive definition of democracy is provided by Heywood (2007), who affirms that democracy is “ a system of government that serves the interests of the people regardless of their participation in political life.”

Liberalism is the concept that the preservation of individual liberty and the maximization of the freedom of choice should be the main concern of the

Government. All individuals stand equal before law and they all have the right to know the actions those they elected take in order to pursue the goals of society. According to Fenna (2006), liberalism was born “ as an ideology of liberation, seeking to free individuals from various constraints and tyrannies”, most importantly seeking to eradicate the idea of social status and privileged families.

Policy context

The combination between democracy and liberalism has been extensively debated. The topic of liberal democracy is quite controversial and opinions vary. Some believe in its capacity to ensure public accountability, others believe the tensions between democracy and capitalism could endanger the system. The fact remains that liberal democracy has given Australia a lot of internal stability over the past decades and the political system here is not in any danger of collapsing.

Vromen, A (2005) says that liberal democracies are “ complex societies, in which people often disagree over fundamental concepts and values”.

Representative for liberal democracies are the existence of a government that protects the interests of the people, and the libertarian view upon the existing society. Terms such as freedom of speech and freedom of press are very common in a liberal democratic state, such as Australia.

Liberalism was very well represented in economics, where Adam Smith created the “ invisible hand” and the entire concept of free market. The metaphor created by Smith actually describes the self-regulating nature of a free market. In a liberal democratic nation, the free market is a must. Other

political ideologies, such as communism for example, do not believe in the concept of the “invisible hand” and feel that the market should be under the full control of the government.

Policy impact

This type of policy has a direct impact on the Australian Constitution. A Constitution, according to Ward (2010), can be considered as being a “social contract that sets out the agreed procedural rules that apply to the political system”. The Australian Constitution was drafted by the colonial politicians during the 1890s and it was legislated by the British parliament in 1900. It is the superior act on which the federal and parliamentary systems of government are based.

The Australian Constitution is an integrated part of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act. This Act contains nine sections, and while sections 1 to 8 contain the legal procedures of the establishment of the Commonwealth, the ninth one represents the Australian Constitution, which is divided in eight chapters and totals 128 sections.

The political system is divided between two major political parties. The Australian Labour Party (or the ALP) was founded by the Australian Labour Movement and it represents the urban working class. This social democratic party has been a part of the Commonwealth of Australia since the elections in 2007 and Julia Gillard, the Prime Minister of Australia, belongs to this party.

The Liberal Party of Australia was founded in 1944 and it is the main competitor of the Australian Labour Party for the political office. The party

<https://assignbuster.com/the-australian-political-system/>

advocates for economic liberalism, however it has more recently adopted a more conservative political agenda.

Policy alternatives

Policy implementation

The Australian political system has borrowed many aspects from the British system, as a consequence of the membership of the Commonwealth. The Parliament is extremely important in Australia, as it is the keystone of our system of representative democracy (Singleton 2009).

As a consequence of being a democratic liberal state, Australia is a federal nation and has an elected House of Representatives and a Senate. Australia is a constitutional monarchy, with elements from multiple other democracies: the executive aspects of Australia's political system derive from the British system, while the Australian federal design is derived from the United States.

Australia has a constitution available in a written form. The governmental elements of the constitution are charged by the legal courts, but conventions – meaning unwritten constitutional acts – are not, since they are enforced by public conscience and opinion. The provisions of the Australian constitutional statutes are entrenched, meaning they cannot be changed by the ordinary law-making process. In Australia, the amendment to the constitution is possible, but it demands a referendum.

In the Australian system a general election can be called at any time. There is a maximum term by which that particular election must be called, but it

can sometimes be held short of term. This practice makes the parliament responsible to the electorate body.

Democracy and liberalism are the groundwork of Australian politics, and, as Stokes (2004) affirms, political ideologies are not only a means to control and organise public agendas, but also of galvanizing action in support of them. Political ideologies are extremely important in the development of a stable political system, which is why Australian politics may be considered as the implementation of democratic and liberal political ideologies.

Effectiveness of policy

Conclusion

Australia is a liberal democratic state and a welfare state. The two concepts are interconnected and cannot be one without the other. Politics in Australia is all about protecting and promoting the economic and social well-being of its citizens. In turn, the citizens must contribute to society and respect the rule of law.

The liberal democratic system in Australia has proven to be highly stable over the past few decades. Australia has become a modern society, with well-established laws and a strong free market economy. In the context of globalization, Australia stands as a properly governed liberal democratic country.

Even though the political parties in Australia may have their differences and posing opinions might arise, citizens rest assured that the laws the Parliament passes and the decisions its members make are made within the best interest of the Australian citizens.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-australian-political-system/>