

Democracy measures in united kingdom, france, japan and china term paper

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Comparative politics is a field that is crucial to understanding the world political systems. Though there are ways in which human beings analyze phenomena, comparative politics takes an empirical approach. This means that information is collected and analyzed objectively. This therefore means that political scientists are faced with the difficult problem of classifying states of the world.

To achieve this, various paradigms are suggested that can be used to classify states. But what causes a major problem is whether the very paradigms used are adequate and whether only the empirical method is the only direction that effectively analyses phenomena. It is against this awakening that some scholars developed some measures of aggregation to capture these paradigms (Munck, 53).

Issues such as democracy and political power have motivated several political scientists to advance theories. For example how does one measure democracy? In essence, this question is very difficult to answer. Thus, it is not easy to say such a country is more democratic than the other.

However this does not mean that it is not important to find a certain way of measuring democracy. This standard through which democracy can be measured should incorporate an almost universal acceptance of what the characteristics of democracy are. Several political scientists came up with some ways of measuring this by advancing certain theories.

Robert Dahl coined the term polyarchy with reference to the rule by many (Dahl 45). This was guided by the fact that democratic support emanates

from consensus and participation of the larger group of citizens. This is however an ideal scenario. So, states that tend to be closer to this can be said to be more democratic as opposed to those who deviate from this ideal.

Dahl, therefore, has gone to a greater extent to aid us in using the principle of polyarchy to group various systems as being democratic or non-democratic. He says that citizens must fully participate in the government for that government to qualify as a polyarchy (Dahl, 98).

This means that the citizens should not only agree with the government to be seen to be participating but they should also be at liberty to criticize or even contest whatever issue the government may advance that they do not agree with. The people, in actual sense, must be free to formulate what they prefer without any form of discrimination by the government (Dahl, 76). This could be seen fully effected by the government being able to put in place some sure guarantees.

For instance, the government should allow its members to freely form and join organizations of their choice; have the right to expression, vote, contest for power and, finally, to have freedom of access to information. What is more, the elections must be free and fair as well as the ordinary people having unrestrained eligibility to vie for those elections (Diamond, 33). The state should be beholden to the whims and will of the citizens. The reverse should not occur.

In a nutshell Dahl's measure of democracy bases its conclusion on combining two measures, rights and liberties on the scale of 1-7. Each indicator runs on

a scale between 1 and 7; this therefore means that the theoretical scores will range from 2-14 (Dahl, 1957). Remember this is reached by adding the earlier two scores together. After this is done, Dahl then brings in a cut-off point of 7: meaning that any score above 7 shows that the state is democratic, whereas any score below 7 shows a non-democratic tendency.

Polity project has existed since 1970s. Its rankings are based on two major scales: democracy and autocracy. The democracy scale comprises other subscales that have to do with political participation, competition, openness and constraints on the chief executive.

For the autocracy scale, there are also four subscales namely: absence of competition, regulated political participation, no competitiveness and finally, absence of the constraints on executive authority. The scales run from -10 to +10; where -10 reflects a state that is totally undemocratic while +10 reflects one which is fully democratic.

So the particular state has all the democratic elements put on scale as well as the undemocratic elements. Finally, the autocracy scale is subtracted from the democracy scale and the difference taken and put on the resultant scale of -10 to +10 for conclusion. For example, -10 could represent a hereditary monarchy while +10 score could represent a consolidated democracy.

Vanhanen's index of democracy (ID) largely focuses on three variables: degree of competition, extent of participation and finally the extent to which power is distributed (Sodaro, 1988). Unlike other measures discussed above,

this index is open-ended. Competitiveness can be seen from the number of political parties that take part in an election, while participation is reflected by the number of people who take part in the election of state leadership.

Power distribution is, on the other hand, reflected by the dispersion of seats in the legislature. The final ranking is placed on a continuum of very high index values to that of zero index values, such that the higher the country scores on that continuum, the more democratic that country is considered. Should a country score zero that country is considered highly undemocratic.

United Kingdom 12

France 10

Japan 8

China 2

The results for United Kingdom are justified looking at the type of government. Though UK can be considered a constitutional monarchy, there is clear evidence that there are rights and liberties enjoyed by its citizens. Its election system comprises two parties namely Conservative and Labour parties (Diamond, 65).

Although it has a monarch too, the monarchy is only symbolic. But what makes it not score highly is that though there is a monarchy the citizens do not play any role in the elevation of one to this position. Now put against Dahl's measure of polyarchy we see in this case the citizens fall short of

feeling free to “ formulate own preferences. In other words, they are not free to join this ‘ organization’ of royalty. All in all, the citizens of Britain enjoy freedom of expression.

The leaders are equally free to compete politically. Another flaw is that some people from Northern Ireland are not clearly well represented in leadership of UK, thus the conclusion that though UK falls in the bracket of polyarchy, it falls short due to its failure to meet certain requirements as discussed.

France is almost like UK only that its system of government comprises a mix of both parliamentary and presidential system (Hollifield and Ross 90). Its citizenry is free to join organizations and is also able to participate in elections. This is evident from the number of political parties there. The citizenry also can demonstrate against the government. Though its people are free to participate in electing the president, they do not have the same power when it comes to choosing or vetting the cabinet and those that will take party posts.

Japan, on the other hand, takes the form of a parliamentary democracy. The executive is usually selected from the dominant party or a coalition of parties. Members of parliament are competitively elected by the people. The dominant parties here are Liberal Democratic Party (LPD) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

The prime minister is appointed by parliament. The Japanese people are free to join parties of their choice. The Japanese also have the freedom of expression as seen in plurality of the parties and media. They also have the

right to vote. Its political leaders, however, are not free to compete for political power since the major parties seem to decide who leads the party while parliament chooses the prime minister and not the citizens being bestowed the responsibility of directly electing one.

China performs dismally on Dahl's measure. The citizens of China do not have the freedom to select their chief executive. Only the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has the power to do this. This party has ruled the country for decades.

Currently the president happens to be executive secretary of CCP. Actually, China is a one party dictatorship. Dissent is abhorred by the leadership. There is censure of both print and electronic media. The people lack freedom of expression. Political dissent is usually crushed ruthlessly. In essence, the rights and liberties of the citizens are almost absent.

United Kingdom 09

France 08

Japan 04

China -9

United Kingdom citizens on democracy scale participate in the politics. This is evident in the presence of political parties. Other small parties are not discriminated against. The rights of its citizens are also respected and

protected. The prime minister is elected through a multi-party political system that is highly competitive.

There are also executive constraints on the executive in the UK. Though the UK has an unwritten constitution, constraints are placed on the executive through the legislature, judicial precedents and even the norms that have been set and respected over a long period of time.

France has competitive multiparty elections to elect the president. The prime minister is usually chosen by the president from the party that wins the majority seats in an election (Hollifield and Ross 92).

On the executive constraints, they are a bit not as many as those of the UK. For instance, in France, the president has immense powers to dissolve parliament even without concurring with the prime minister. Besides, the national assembly is usually obliged to give priority to bills emanating from the executive as opposed to those coming from elsewhere (Duch 44). However, the assembly still has matters to do with education, tax, war etc.

Japan, having a parliamentary system through which the chief executive is appointed, scores highly when it comes to competitive elections. Power has been seen shifting between Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

In Japan the executive is subordinate to the House of Representatives, from which the prime minister is selected. The prime minister is also checked by legislature.

As earlier mentioned, Japan has elections that are carried out competitively through the several political parties like DPJ, LDP, Komeito and even Your Party, among others. In all aspects Japan ranks zero. This is why I awarded it 4 in the polity rankings.

China performs dismally in the polity rankings. Elements of autocracy are many. The Communist Party is the only one designated to choose the chief executive.

There are almost nil executive constraints. The CCP dominates both the political, social and even economic life of Chinese society. Though there is some rule of law, it majorly deals with issues social, economical and not political.

Political participation is missing. In cases of political dissent, this is met with high-handed state repression that leads to those involved being hanged, committed to long jail terms or even forced to seek asylum abroad.

United Kingdom 19

France 13.5

Japan 12

China 0.2

From the above scores on the continuum, the United Kingdom takes the lead, probably based on the concepts earlier discussed, followed by France

Japan and then China. It can be gleaned that UK is more democratic unlike China which is placed lowest on the continuum.

From the discussion it can be concluded that the various theoretical frameworks have provided great inroads into classifying states. Even though the various frameworks have their weaknesses one sees a pattern of consistency in the way various countries are classified. However, what needs to be looked into is whether democracy is good for all societies and whether there is a connection between democracy and economic prosperity.

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