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THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF MAJORITY DEMOCRACY & CONSENSUS DEMOCRACY: AN EXAMPLE OF THE US AND BRITAIN

Seda Gözde Tokath

Asst. Prof. International Relations Department, Izmir Democracy University, Türkiye

Corresponding Author: Seda Gözde Tokath

ABSTRACT

A democracy is a rule of law, in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens. It encompasses social, economic, and cultural conditions that enable the free and equal practice of political self-determination. The concept of democracy has been with us since the first city-states were established in ancient Greece. Democracy has taken multiple forms, both in theory and practice. It is an active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life, and the protection of the human rights of all citizens. This paper will endeavor to understand two most common forms of democracy, which are majoritarian democracy, often associated with either presidential systems or Westminster-style parliamentary regimes, with single-member district or 'first past the post' systems, and secondly, consensus democracies, which are mostly associated with proportional representation electoral systems in parliamentary government. Both democracies have their own importance, and it depends on the policies of the government, which ultimately determine the type of democracy. The main purpose of this article is to compare two types of democracy and to evaluate the features of the majoritarian and consensus models of democracies. During this study, its focus will be on the descriptive theory by using comparison methods and techniques.

KEY WORDS: Majoritarian Democracy, Consensus Democracy, US, Britain, Political Culture

INTRODUCTION

The concept of democracy dates to the establishment of the first city-states in ancient Greece. Democracy has evolved into multiple forms, both in theory and practice. At its core, democracy involves the active participation of citizens in political and civic life, along with the protection of their fundamental human rights. This paper seeks to examine two of the most common forms of democracy: majoritarian democracy—often associated with presidential systems or that use single-member district or “first-past-the-post” electoral systems—and consensus democracy, which is typically linked to proportional representation in parliamentary systems. Each form of

democracy carries its own significance, and the type adopted by a state often depends on its governmental policies and institutional preferences. The primary aim of this study is to compare these two models and evaluate the distinctive features of majoritarian and consensus democracies. The analysis will rely on descriptive theory and comparative methods to provide a clearer understanding of their key characteristics.

Majoritarian and consensus democracies differ fundamentally in how political power is distributed and exercised. In a majoritarian democracy, political power is concentrated in the hands of the majority. The principle of “the majority rules” dominates decision-

making, often producing strong, single-party governments. In contrast, a consensus democracy emphasizes broad participation and power-sharing. Its main goal is to include as many voices and groups as possible in the political process, encouraging compromise and cooperation among different parties.

Some varieties of democracy provide better representation and more freedom for their citizens than others. (Gaus, 2004, 143) However, if any democracy is not structured to prohibit the government from excluding the people from the legislative process, or any branch of government from altering the separation of powers in its own favor, then a branch of the system can accumulate too much power and destroy the democracy.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- How do democratic political cultures function in the majoritarian democracy (US) and consensus democracy (Britain)?
- In what ways does political culture affect the functioning of democracy in the U.S. and the U.K.?
- What role does political culture play in sustaining democratic stability in the US and Britain?

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Majoritarian and consensus democracies differ fundamentally in how political power is distributed and exercised. In a majoritarian democracy, political power is concentrated in the hands of the majority. The principle of “the majority rules” dominates decision-making, often producing strong, single-party governments. In contrast, a consensus democracy emphasizes broad participation and power-sharing. Its main goal is to include as many voices and groups as possible in the political process, encouraging compromise and cooperation among different parties.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

1. COMPARISON BETWEEN MAJORITARIAN AND CONSENSUS DEMOCRACY IN THEORY

1.1. Electoral Systems

Majoritarian democracies typically use a first past-the-post (FPTP) system, where the candidate with the most votes wins. This system often leads to two-party dominance and provides clear winners, which ensures stable governments but may exclude smaller parties from fair representation. Consensus democracies, on the other hand, employ proportional representation (PR). Under PR systems, political parties receive seats in proportion to the number of votes they gain. This system allows for a more accurate reflection of voter preferences and encourages multiparty coalitions in government.

There are some similarities and differences between the two types of democracy. Similarly, the fact that both governments are regularly held accountable to the people makes them democratic; however, looking more closely at the details means that, in this instance, America is slightly more democratic. In the US, the date of elections is fixed for every two, four, or six years; the candidates are elected in November and inaugurated in January, and those dates cannot be changed. But in the UK, the Prime Minister can set the date of the election himself, as long as it does not exceed a five-year gap between elections. This means that the election can be set to coincide with good publicity for the PM and their Party, or to avoid bad news.

Secondly, America's democratic claims are also reinforced by the strict separation of powers that is stipulated in the Constitution. The executive has no direct influence in Congress, Congress has no power over the Executive, and the Judiciary has no power over either and cannot be influenced by either. Because of this, there is no chance for a President to form a dictatorship because, theoretically at least, the system of checks and balances protects democracy. Also, both the Prime Minister and the President have impressive powers of appointment.

In this way, America is more democratic because the President cannot arbitrarily appoint someone to a particular post. For example, the case of Harriet Miers, President Bush nominated her for the Supreme Court when she had no experience as a Judge and had worked with him for years. Although she withdrew her application, the Senate probably would not have ratified her appointment, thus proving America's democracy. Added to this is the larger number of elected positions in America officials like town Sheriffs are elected, while far more in the UK are simply appointed. In this way, America is more democratic because the people have a greater say in who runs their country at all levels.

The corpus of work by Arend Lijphart has attracted such widespread attention that “it is difficult to discuss the contemporary European democracies without reference to Lijphart (Bulsara and Kissane, 2009). According to Lijphart's case, majoritarian democracies such as Britain typically have first past-the-post and disproportional electoral systems, only two major political parties, single-party cabinets, unicameralism, and unitary and centralized government. It has a flexible and easily amended constitution and an executive-dominated legislature. In broad terms, in the majoritarian model, political power is concentrated, exclusive, and has little emphasis on public participation. The consensus model, by contrast, emphasizes the inclusive, deliberative sharing of power and public engagement with the political process (Flinders, 2017)

On the contrary, consensus democracy, such as the US, is characterized by the following: proportional electoral systems with multimember districts, more than two major parties, coalition cabinets, strong bicameralism, and decentralized or federal political systems. There is also a balance of power between the executive and legislative branches. (Mair, 2010)

1.2. Executive–Legislative Relations

In majoritarian systems, the executive (government) usually dominates the legislature. This is evident in Westminster-style parliamentary systems such as Britain, where the ruling party often holds a majority in parliament, enabling swift decision-making. Conversely, in consensus democracies, the executive and legislature are more balanced. Coalition governments and bicameral legislatures ensure that power is shared and that major decisions require negotiation and compromise, as seen in countries like Switzerland or the Netherlands. The fact that the British executive may be held accountable more frequently than elections would allow through Prime Minister's Question Time and other departmental question times. In these sessions, the government is questioned on all its activities by the opposition and their own party, meaning that, theoretically, the executive shouldn't be able to keep important secrets from the people and become too overpowering; instead, they are frequently reminded of the fact that they work for the people. In the States, the President and his Ministers are not faced with these sessions and so are not held accountable so often. In this way, Britain is more democratic. However, in the UK, the executive is inextricably linked with the legislative party as the Prime Minister is a Member of Parliament, as are all the other Ministers. This means

that the Executive has the potential to dominate Parliament, regardless of other viewpoints. America is more democratic in this respect; the legislative body cannot be overtly controlled by the executive. America is known as the greatest democracy in the world, and Britain has been called the mother of all democracies.

1.3. Party Systems and Representation

The party system reflects the nature of democracy within a state. Majoritarian democracies often have a two-party system, simplifying governance but limiting political diversity. Consensus democracies encourage multiparty systems, ensuring that different social, cultural, and regional groups have a voice in policymaking. This diversity enhances representation but can sometimes slow decision-making due to the need for broader agreement.

Also, in terms of representation of minority rights, in a consensus democracy, coalition governments and proportional representation ensure that minority voices are included in the decision-making process (Arter, 2006). Majoritarian democracy risks underrepresenting minority groups and reducing inclusiveness in decision-making (Lijphart, 1999).

2. GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES OF BRITAIN AND THE US

The constitutional structure of the American national government was designed to provide for a division and balance of power among three separate and largely independent policy-making organs of government—the U.S. House of Representatives, the U.S. Senate, and the Presidency. This provides the three organs of government with different constituencies with varying and competing interests, necessitating the concurrence of all three governmental organs to secure the adoption and implementation of highly controversial decisions on national public policy, and preventing quick and easy government decision-making by simple majority vote of the voters' elected representatives. (Leroy- 2019).

The constitutional system is intended to prevent the tyranny of the majority or majoritarian dictatorship. A majority of the British voters, in a national election, gives its elected representatives and political leaders a clear mandate to govern, without any need to negotiate, bargain, and compromise with elements of the minority party. The victorious majority party is put in the position where it can take complete charge of the government, where the party can quickly and easily make and carry out the authoritative, binding decisions of government, exercising this political authority in the service of the interests, views (Leroy, 2019).

The majoritarian model tends to have a unitary and centralized government, while the consensus model tends to have a federal and decentralized government. Flexible constitutions are typical of the Westminster model, whereas constitutions that need special majorities to be changed are in consensual democracies. Executive-dependent central banks are normal in majoritarian models, while independent ones are common in consensus democracies. Westminster uses a majoritarian and disproportional method, whereas consensus uses a proportional one. Majoritarian democracy used to have cabinets consisting only of members of the same party; in consensus democracy, normally, “let all or most of the important parties share executive power in a broad coalition”.

There is also a paradox about two models of democracy. First, the United States' political system, which is disproportional, the cabinet make-up and party system (two-party) is not only difficult to classify because of its presidential features but also scores the second-highest power-dispersion rank on the federal-unitary scales. The United

States is also identified as a majoritarian and Britain as a consensus type due to their distance from the executive parties. dimension. Second, Lijphart's democracy model prefers consensus democracy over majoritarian democracy, even though the latter may be more efficient compared to the former (Mair 2011). This is because many voters have a say. The main driving force for the superiority of consensus democracies is their macroeconomic performance. Majoritarian democracies do not outperform the consensus democracies on macro-economic management and the control of violence; in fact, the violence.

The consensus democracies have a slightly better record, but the consensus democracies clearly perform the majoritarian democracies about the quality of democracy and democratic representation, and the kindness of their public policy orientations. (Lipjhard;301). Yet, presidential systems are much more likely to follow military rule and are also more prone to democratic breakdown than parliamentary systems due to the persisting military influence. It is argued that in the real world, majoritarian democracy cannot prevent all violent ethnic conflicts. Many of the majoritarian democratic societies also experienced violent ethnic conflict, especially riots. Even worse, competitive elections sometimes provide incentives for ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize voters ethnically, and such mobilizations may result in violent ethnic conflict. In ethnically divided societies since the capacity to regulate violent conflict is argued to be the sole benefit of majoritarian democracy. (Wang, 247). Careful consideration must be taken before efforts to use majoritarian democracy to prevent violent ethnic conflicts. Majoritarian democracies are especially appropriate for work best in homogenous societies, whereas consensus democracy is far more suitable for plural societies. (Lipjhard, 1984). Lijphart (2012) suggests that policies in consensus democracies may be more stable and that policymaking is more inclusive, but how this should translate into lower unemployment or, say, more development aid is not elaborated.(Lijphart,2012). Lijphart goes directly from measuring the type of democracy to performance.

The more majoritarian the country's institutions, the more winners get to have a say and impose their will on the minority (Anderson,2008). The more consensual the democracy, the more likely it is that losers are satisfied with the functioning of the democracy, and the less likely it is that winners are satisfied. (Anderson,2008) Majoritarian systems do not have a better record of governing (Lipjhard, 1984). Proponents of majoritarianism also tend to argue that coalition governments lead to ineffectual governance as compromise and negotiation become key (Shah, 2013).

2.1. CONSENSUS DEMOCRACY MODEL IN THE US

To what extent does the U.S. political system combine majoritarian and consensus democratic principles?

Majoritarian democracy emphasizes clear winners, decisive outcomes, and concentration of power. Consensus democracy requires varying degrees of consensus rather than just a mere democratic majority. It typically attempts to protect minority rights from domination by majority rule. Consensus democracy is the application of consensus decision-making to the process of legislation in a democracy. It is characterized by a decision-making structure that involves and considers as broad a range of opinions as possible, as opposed to systems where minority opinions can potentially be ignored by vote-winning majorities. While its constitutional design strongly reflects consensus-oriented mechanisms, political practice—especially elections and party competitions- often operates in a majoritarian way.

The 21st Century needs to be based on principles that align with the trends of society. These principles need to establish a basic understanding of how diversity can be brought to a shared vision; how a new concept of the common good can be evolved. The basic principles of consensus democracy recognize the need for a new institutional way to allow all citizens to have access to direct control of the decision-making process.

A consensual system provides the political minority with a voice in the decision-making process. The US system of government, a consensus democracy, was carefully designed to delay majority decision-making and action, to prevent quick and easy decision-making by a majority of the voters and their elected representatives in the government (Leroy,2019)

The constitutional structure of the national government has a longstanding political practices and significant characteristics of American political culture is to create an electoral system which prevents quick and easy formation of a nationwide electoral majority and makes it extremely difficult for such an electoral coalition to attain sufficient strength, unity and win in enough constituencies to place complete control of the legislative and executive organs of the national government in the hands of the leadership of a single cohesive, highly disciplined political party. (Leroy,2019)

The US system requires the support of a consensus--rather than simple majority approval--for adoption and implementation of governmental decisions on controversial questions of national public policy. The US constitutional system was designed to safeguard individual liberties and the welfare of the entire political society against the possibility of a self-interested and over majority emerging within the nation. In the US, while the Constitution seeks to prevent tyranny of the majority through power-sharing and minority protections, modern political dynamics increasingly push the system toward majoritarian competition—often resulting in stalemate rather than effective consensus.

Consensus democracies have a slightly better record than majoritarian democracies in economic management and in the control of violence. Moreover, they perform better at promoting women's representation, reducing inequalities, encouraging electoral participation, promoting citizens' satisfaction with democracy, protecting the environment, providing social welfare, avoiding high crime rates, and encouraging generosity in foreign aid (Mainwaring,2001).

2.2.MAJORITY DEMOCRACY IN BRITAIN

To what extent does the majoritarian model in Britain promote stability at the expense of pluralism?

Majoritarian democracy refers to a democracy based upon majority rule of a society's citizens (Anderson,2008). Majoritarian democracy is the conventional form of democracy used as a political system in many countries. Concentration of executive power in one party and bare majority: The ruling cabinet consists of a one-party majority and excludes minority parties. Under the British System, the winners of the election are in a strong position to implement their preferred positions. Under a one-party government and cabinet decision-making in an environment of an unwritten constitution, unitary and centralized government, the majority rules and the minority opposes (Anderson,2008). Most of the British voters, in a single national election, elect a majority of the members of the House of Commons, and the Commons majority, in effect, chooses the Prime Minister and other Cabinet members. Majoritarian democracies were regarded as those in which a winning party or coalition of parties

could exercise virtually limitless power within a political system, in that executive authority was scarcely constrained. (Mair, 2011).

The governmental system is geared for quick and easy political decision-making by a popular majority and its elected representatives in the government (Leroy,2019). Majoritarian democracies are more representative than consensual democracies, and they depend on several things that must be present in a system before such a democracy can be established.

The governmental system is geared for quick decision-making and action by the voters in a single national election, and quick decision-making and action by a united, highly disciplined party majority in the legislature (Leroy,2019). Majoritarian democracy is not universally accepted - majoritarian democracy was famously criticized as having the inherent danger of becoming a "tyranny of the majority" whereby the majority in society could oppress or exclude minority groups.

The majority party is put in the position where it can take complete charge of the government, where the party can quickly and easily make and carry out the authoritative, binding decisions of government, exercising this political authority in the service of the interests, views, and ideology of the majority party and its supporters (Leroy,2019). It does not allow the opposition to have much influence over government policy.

CONCLUSION

Political culture plays a central role in shaping the functioning and stability of democracy in both the US and Britain, though in different ways. In the U.S., a majoritarian democracy, political culture emphasizes individualism, personal freedom, and active citizen participation, which drives accountability and competitive politics. Citizens' strong commitment to civil liberties, voting, and civic engagement ensures that government policies reflect public preferences, while respect for constitutional principles and the separation of powers sustains democratic stability by preventing any branch from dominating. In contrast, the U.K., while traditionally a majoritarian system, incorporates consensus-oriented cultural elements such as respect for institutions, pragmatic compromise, and gradual reform.

Both majoritarian and consensus democracies offer valuable models of governance. The majoritarian model emphasizes efficiency, clarity, and accountability, whereas the consensus model values inclusivity, representation, and stability. Ultimately, the choice between the two depends on a country's historical background, political culture, and social structure. Effective democracy often involves finding a balance between majority rule and minority rights to ensure both stable governance and fair representation. The governmental system in the US is the prime example of a contemporary consensus democracy. As we have seen, the British political regime and most other constitutional democracies in the world today are majoritarian democracies. Consensus systems are superior in democratic and social performance.

In conclusion, it is clear that in reality neither electoral system – majoritarian nor proportional – will be better than the other, because neither gives us the desired political outcomes we desire. In fact, this article seeks a middle ground; a well-designed electoral system should be able to combine the best of both worlds – high accountability and fair representation.

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