DEMOCRATIC THEORY: SOME APPROACHES AND CONSIDERATIONS TO MAKE IT PARTICIPATIVE

TEORIA DEMOCRÁTICA: ALGUMAS APROXIMAÇÕES E CONSIDERAÇÕES PARA O FAZER PARTICIPATIVO

TEORÍA DEMOCRÁTICA: ALGUNAS APROXIMACIONES Y CONSIDERACIONES SOBRE LA PRÁCTICA PARTICIPATIVA

Pierre André Garcia PIRES[1]
e-mail: pierreufac@gmail.com

Pelegrino Santos VERÇOSA[2]
e-mail: peleacre@gmail.com

Andréa Maria Lopes DANTAS[3]
e-mail: a.copaiba@gmail.com

Editor: Prof. PhD. Sebastião de Souza Lemes
Deputy Executive Editor: Prof. PhD. José Anderson Santos Cruz

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[1] Federal University of Acre (UFAC), Rio Branco – AC – Brazil. Associate Professor I. Center for Education, Letters, and Arts. Doctoral degree in Education from UFPR.
[2] Federal University of Acre (UFAC), Rio Branco – AC – Brazil. Assistant professor IV. Center for Education, Letters, and Arts. Doctoral degree in Education from UFPR.
[3] Federal University of Acre (UFAC), Rio Branco – AC – Brazil. Associate Professor IV. Center for Education, Letters, and Arts. Doctoral degree in Education from PUC/SP.

ABSTRACT: The present article presents the conception of democracy, discussing its origin and trajectory up to the contemporary era. Democracy is understood as a form of government that enables decision-making and the formulation of rules and collective discussions involving representatives elected by the people, with the active participation of these representatives in decision-making and the prevention of an autocratic regime. Two types of democracy are highlighted: direct democracy, in which mass participation occurs without representatives in discussions and decision-making, and representative democracy, in which the people elect their representatives to decide on matters concerning the collective. Additionally, some characteristics and limitations of democracy are emphasized. Democracy presupposes the central establishment of rules, as without restrictions in a democratic process, democracy cannot exist or survive, at least in terms of the decision-making and participation process.

KEYWORDS: Direct Democracy. Representative democracy. Bound. Rules. Participation.

RESUMO: *O presente artigo apresenta a concepção de democracia, discutindo sua origem e trajetória até a contemporaneidade. A democracia é entendida como uma forma de governo que possibilita não apenas a tomada de decisões, mas também a elaboração de regras e discussões coletivas envolvendo os representantes eleitos pelo povo, com a participação ativa desses representantes nas decisões e na prevenção de um regime autocrático. São destacados dois tipos de democracia: a democracia direta, na qual a participação em massa ocorre sem a presença de representantes nas discussões e tomadas de decisão, e a democracia representativa, na qual o povo elege seus representantes para decidirem questões que dizem respeito à coletividade. Também são ressaltadas algumas características e limitações da democracia. A democracia pressupõe como ponto central o estabelecimento de regras, uma vez que, sem regras em um processo democrático, a democracia não pode existir ou sobreviver, pelo menos no que se refere ao processo de tomada de decisões e participação.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Democracia Direta. Democracia representativa. Limite. Regramentos. Participação.*

RESUMEN: *El presente artículo presenta la concepción de democracia, discutiendo su origen y trayectoria hasta la contemporaneidad. La democracia es entendida como una forma de gobierno que viene posibilitar, además de la toma de decisiones, la elaboración de reglas y discusiones colectivas de los representantes elegidos por el pueblo, a la alta participación de estos participantes en las decisiones y cuestiones que impiden un régimen de gobierno autocrático. Destaca dos tipos de democracia: directa, como una forma de participación de masas sin representantes para los debates y la toma de decisiones y representativa, donde el pueblo elige a sus representantes para que puedan decidir cuestiones relevantes para la comunidad. Sigue destacando algunas características y límites de la democracia. La democracia asume como punto principal la regulación, ya que, si no hay reglas en un proceso democrático, la democracia no existe, no tiene forma de sobrevivir, al menos en lo que se refiere al proceso de toma de decisiones y participación.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Democracia directa. Democracia representativa. Límite. Reglas. Participación.*

Introduction

Democracy is grounded in the autonomy and freedom of each individual when expressing their opinions and disagreeing with others. We recognize that people are diverse, each with their way of thinking and acting, and it is essential to respect these differences. The democratic principle emphasizes our equality and the right to dissent from our peers. We are free to have divergent thoughts and maintain our contradictions and viewpoints without anyone being considered superior to others. Therefore, it is imperative to respect the differences of others to reach a consensus with them.

In this way, the participation of all individuals is intrinsically related to the issue of citizenship, as it directly connects to the community's political life. "The idea of citizenship proclaims the political responsibility of each individual and, therefore, defends the voluntary organization of social life against non-political logics [...]" (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 97, our translation). This allows citizens to participate actively or passively in social issues.

Democracy: origin, concepts, and characteristics

According to Bobbio (1998, p. 319, our translation), the origin of the term democracy has its roots in Greek philosophical tradition: "*demos* = people and *kratos* = to rule," thus understood as government by the people or emanating from the people. The Athenians probably coined this term, although "*demos*" generally referred to the entirety of the Athenian people and sometimes meant only the *ordinary people* or *people with low incomes* (DAHL, 2001).

Dahl (2001) posits that democracy can be created and recreated autonomously over time whenever suitable conditions exist. According to him, these conditions have occurred at various moments and places, each with distinct characteristics.

Bobbio (1998) identifies three historical traditions in democratic political thought throughout history: the **classical theory**, which views it as the government of the people; the **medieval theory**, where power emanates from the prince or the church and is transmitted through the delegation of authority from the superior to the inferior, thus not allowing for social participation; and the **modern theory**, which emerged with the Modern State, within the configurations of large monarchies, where historical forms of government essentially boiled down to two: monarchy and republic.

In contemporary theory, democracy bears a solid resemblance to Greek democracy, especially concerning the public sphere of governance, where citizens engage in debates over

emerging conflicts and tend to arrive at solutions or consensus. There are alternative ways to make collective decisions when this does not occur. An example of this in the public sphere of Greek democracy is the assemblies in which all citizens were allowed to participate.

> The assembly elected some essential officials - generals, for example, as strange as it may seem. The primary method for selecting citizens for other public duties was a lottery in which eligible citizens had an equal chance of being chosen. According to some estimates, ordinary citizens had a good chance of being selected by this lottery at least once in their lifetime to serve as the most critical official presiding over the government (DAHL, 2001, p. 22, our translation).

The term "democracy" is used to describe one of the forms of government based on the exercise of political power by the people and for the people, with the recognition of the existence of institutions that represent them, thus ensuring the rights of citizens. According to Dahl (2001), in different periods and places, political systems with significantly distinct political institutions have been labeled as republics or democracies, granting fundamental rights to citizens within the political structures.

As the state begins to serve the interests of the people, with the people being sovereign and governed by their representatives, each with distinct functions and powers representative of the state itself, the responsibility to realize the democratic principle in practice arises.

This state, grounded in the direction of the democratic method, entails the election of rulers and requires a high degree of representation and participation, especially from the population. The role of politics in individuals is recognized, where each person is a citizen with rights, capable of expressing their ideas and desires, with the right to implement their convictions and intervene in the public sphere.

Touraine (1996, p. 23-24, our translation), "defines the subject as the construction of the individual (or group) as an actor through the association of their affirmed freedom with their assumed and reinterpreted life experience". This subject represents the effort to promote changes and transformations in lived situations, in other words, to advocate for social issues.

From these reflections, this subject represents a force in pursuing concrete rights that affect their life through their growing experience and social, economic, and cultural achievements.

Gadea and Scherer-Warren (2005), regarding Touraine's contributions to the subject, emphasize that:

> The idea of democracy for Touraine does not solely materialize in the set of institutional and formal guarantees but rather represents the struggle of individuals, in their culture and freedom, against the dominating logic of social systems. In this conception, individuals need to safeguard their memory and be able to combine rational thought, personal freedom, and cultural identity. Democracy should create spaces for increasingly noticeable participation and ensure respect for individual differences and pluralism (GADEA; SCHERER-WARREN, 2005, p. 41, our translation).

In this context, the subject plays a central role in a democratic process. By representing a specific social group, they must engage in discussions regarding actions that can benefit the collective, countering the issues of dominating society. Decisions should involve a significant number of subjects, respecting the differences and interests of the minority.

It is only in democratic societies that social movements emerge since political free choice compels each social actor to seek the common good while simultaneously advocating for their interests. For this reason, the most significant social movements often adopt universal themes such as "freedom, equality, human rights, justice, and solidarity, establishing an immediate connection between the social actor and the political program" (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 85, our translation).

These social groups act as representatives of the people in discussions and decision-making, although the group's actions are often carried out by some of its members (the group as an entity does not decide). For these decisions to be collectively accepted, the group must establish rules that determine which members are authorized to make decisions on behalf of everyone.

> Regarding the individuals called upon to make (or contribute to making) collective decisions, a democratic regime is characterized by granting this power (which, when authorized by the fundamental law, becomes a right) to a considerable number of group members (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 31, our translation).

In social relations, democracy represents a space for decision-making and the formulation of rules and norms to foster discussions among diverse individuals. It is directly related to decisions that affect the population and are made for the benefit of the people, often through universal suffrage. For Coutinho (2008), the issue of universal suffrage is considered a fundamental part of the democratic process. As the author states:

> Universal suffrage is now an institution that everyone considers an essential condition of any democratic regime; hardly anyone would still have the courage to argue, at least publicly, that women and wage earners should not

vote. *But it is worth remembering that universal suffrage is an achievement of the working class* (COUTINHO, 2008, p. 6, author's emphasis, our translation).

According to Bobbio (2009), "every social group is obliged to make binding decisions for all its members to ensure its survival, both internally and externally" (p. 30). However, these group decisions are effectively made by individuals, and for them to be collectively accepted, they must be based on rules that establish which individuals are authorized to make decisions. This involves "a set of procedural rules for the formation of collective decisions, which envisages and facilitates the broadest possible participation of those interested" (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 22, our translation)

Reinforcing this perspective, Pereira (2012) emphasizes the importance of the rules of the game as a central aspect of democracy:

> [...] it is inherent in any democratic regime to institute norms and laws that regulate the 'game' of political disputes. With the advent of the Modern State, constitutions established rules governing how political power would be contested and exercised in a given country. Such rules characterize a 'democratic' regime, as in an 'autocratic' state, power is never in contention, and the people are never called upon to make any decisions. In this perspective, the 'rules of the game' serve as conditions of democracy (PEREIRA, 2012, 54, our translation).

This brings to the forefront the idea that democracy, based on popular sovereignty, can be ensured by a form of power, often represented by the state itself and that policies emanating from this power can benefit, strengthen, or regulate the rights of all involved citizens. Therefore, democratic regimes must refine their methods to preserve the game's rules.

To Bobbio (2009), the only way to achieve consensus when addressing the topic of democracy is to understand it as:

> [...] opposed to all forms of autocratic government, characterized by a set of (primary or fundamental) rules that establish who is authorized to make collective decisions and by what procedures (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 30, our translation).

This author argues that creating norms and laws to regulate the game of political disputes is inherent to the entire democratic process. Typically, these rules are established through legislation, an aspect that must be taken into consideration when it comes to the difference between what the law establishes and how it is effectively applied. "Certainly, no

historical regime has ever fully adhered to all the rules; therefore, it is permissible to speak of more or less democratic regimes" (BOBBIO, 1998, p. 326, our translation).

In this perspective, these rules are expected to characterize a regime as "democratic." If there is no popular participation in formulating such laws and norms, the State becomes autocratic, where power is never subject to disputes, and the people are never called upon to make decisions. In this regard, Bobbio (1998) emphasizes the importance of the rules of democracy so that they can be integrated into a democratic process, which includes:

> 1) The highest political body, to which the legislative function is assigned, must be composed of members directly or indirectly elected by the people, in first or second-degree elections; 2) Alongside the supreme legislative body, there should be other institutions with elected leaders, such as local administration bodies or the head of state (as is the case in republics); 3) All citizens who have reached the age of majority, without distinction of race, religion, property, and possibly sex, should be voters; 4) All voters must have equal suffrage; 5) All voters must be free to vote according to their own opinion, formed as freely as possible, in an election free from political parties competing to create a national representation; 6) They must also be accessible in the sense that they must be given the opportunity to have natural alternatives (which excludes as democratic any election with a single or blocked list); 7) Both for the list of representatives and for the decisions of the supreme political body, the principle of numerical majority applies, although various forms of majority can be established according to criteria of opportunity not defined once and for all; 8) No decision taken by a majority should limit the rights of the minority, especially the right to become a majority, on equal terms; 9) The government body must enjoy the confidence of the Parliament or the head of the executive power, in turn, elected by the people (BOBBIO, 1998, p. 326, our translation).

Pereira (2012), in his article on Norberto Bobbio's democratic conception, describes that:

> Democracy, as a form of government based on popular sovereignty, is a constantly evolving process, hence the need to establish criteria to define the exercise of political power. Therefore, it is the responsibility of democratic regimes to refine their methods in defense of the "rules of the game" (PEREIRA, 2012, p. 55, our translation).

These rules establish conditions for individuals to have criteria for participation and make decisions that often align with the people's aspirations. "[...] Democracy has come to be understood as a method or a set of procedural rules for the constitution of government and the formation of political decisions" (i.e., decisions that affect the entire community) rather than a specific ideology (BOBBIO, 1998, p. 326, our translation).

The Principles of Democracy

Bobbio (2009) proposes some relevant principles of democracy: (i) the formulation of a set of rules; (ii) the identification of subjects authorized to make decisions in the creation of rules; (iii) the submission of decisions to majority vote; and (iv) the provision of information to subjects for decision-making.

The first principle pointed out by Bobbio (2009) pertains to the idea that democracy requires a set of rules collectively constructed so that the subjects authorized to participate in decision-making have the ability to engage in dialogue and take positions in favor of or against certain situations. According to him, "[...] for a decision made by individuals (one, a few, many, all) to be accepted as a collective decision, it must be made based on rules (whether written or customary) [...]" (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 31, our translation).

The second principle is based on the conception that democracy empowers those subjects authorized by a basic rule to collaborate or make decisions on behalf of the group, thus respecting the representativeness of the issues.

The third principle addresses the idea that a decision made by the majority should prevail over the group as a whole. In other words, all involved will accept and adhere to a collective decision approved by a majority, even if there is no absolute consensus among all participants. In this principle, the collective decision prevails, "[...] decisions approved by at least the majority of those responsible for making decisions" (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 31, our translation).

The fourth and final principle of democracy stipulates that the subjects who will participate in and make decisions must have maximum access to information to make decisions freely on various issues. According to Bobbio (2009), freedom is crucial in this principle because:

> For this condition to be met, those called to decide must be guaranteed the so-called rights of freedom, of opinion, of expression of one's opinions, of assembly, of association, etc. – the rights based on which the liberal state was born and the doctrine of the rule of law in the strong sense, that is, of the state that not only exercises power sub lege but exercises it within limits derived from the constitutional recognition of the 'inviolable' rights of the individual (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 32, our translation).

Liberal ideals, such as voting and the democratic[4] method of the liberal state, have gradually complemented each other over time. In other words, the right to freedom is a prerequisite for applying the rules of the democratic game. It is understood, therefore, that the development of democracy advocates and depends on the freedom and equality rights of individuals in society. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the state to protect the individuals involved from abuses of power. In the words of Pereira (2012), the author understands that the liberal state presupposes popular sovereignty:

> The liberal state is the historical and legal foundation of the democratic state, and this can be confirmed when we observe that liberal achievements - which have become guaranteed by law - such as the right to vote, the right to freedom of opinion and the press, the right to assembly and association, among others, served as the basis for the democratic state and made it possible to expand political participation among different sectors of society (PEREIRA, 2012, p. 59, our translation).

Touraine (1996), in agreement with Norberto Bobbio (2009), presents democracy based on three institutional principles. The first is characterized as a set of rules (whether primary or fundamental) that determines who will be responsible for decisions and what procedures will be adopted by the group. The second principle promotes the idea of a democratic regime with greater participation of the involved subjects. Finally, the third principle stipulates that the choices made by the group must consider the social context in which they are embedded.

> Let us also affirm, along with him, that democracy is based on the replacement of an organic conception of society by an individualistic view whose main elements are the idea of a contract, the replacement of the political being according to Aristotle by the *homo oeconomicus* and utilitarianism, and the pursuit of happiness for the majority of people (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 19, our translation).

According to Dahl (2001), democracy provides essential and desirable benefits beyond the decisions made by the subjects. Among these benefits, prevention of tyranny through collective development, assurance of crucial rights, promotion of general freedom, self-determination, moral autonomy, human development, protection of fundamental personal interests, and political equality stand out.

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[4] Understood here as an institutional system for political decision-making, in which individuals gain the power to decide through a competitive struggle for the electorate's votes. In: SCHUMPETER, Joseph A. *Capitalismo, socialismo e democracia*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar. 1984.

These benefits can be realized when those representing a particular social group put them into practice. However, in the absence of these benefits, an autocratic regime can be established based on the convictions of a single individual who holds all the power of the state and does not consider the consent of other administration members for decision-making.

In addition to the mentioned benefits, the author points out elements that make democracy desirable, such as:

> (i) Democracy helps prevent the rule of cruel and malicious autocrats. (ii) Democracy guarantees citizens fundamental rights that non-democratic systems do not provide (and cannot provide). (iii) Democracy ensures citizens broader individual freedom than any viable alternative. (iv) Democracy helps protect people's fundamental interests. (v) Only a democratic government can provide maximum opportunity for individuals to exercise the freedom of self-determination - that is, to live under laws of their choosing. (vi) Only a democratic government can provide maximum opportunity to exercise moral responsibility. (vii) Democracy promotes human development more fully than any viable alternative. (viii) Only a democratic government can promote a relatively high degree of political equality. (ix) Modern representative democracies do not fight against each other. (x) Countries with democratic governments tend to be more prosperous than countries with non-democratic governments (DAHL, 2001, p. 73-74, our translation).

As previously mentioned, in democratic governments, decisions are not made by a single individual but collectively, unlike autocratic governments, where one person holds absolute power and makes all decisions, controlling the entire administration within their jurisdiction. In a democratic society, voting symbolizes democratic participation in selecting people's representatives for decision-making.

The individual freedom of the subject in the democratic process is manifested in the sense that this individual has the guaranteed right to express their opinions and see their fundamental interests protected, not only from an institutional perspective, as "democracy is not only a set of institutional guarantees, that is negative liberty. It is the struggle of individuals, imbued with their culture and freedom, against the dominating logic of systems [...]" (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 24, our translation). The author further emphasizes that the democratic regime represents the political way of life that offers greater freedom to the majority of subjects.

Another distinctive feature of a democratic government is the freedom of subjects to determine the laws under which they govern their lives and to exercise moral responsibility for their actions. Democracy has the capacity to promote full human development and political equality.

In the democratic process, issues fundamental to the involved subjects are guaranteed. It operates non-hierarchically, defined not only by institutional guarantees but also by respect for individual and collective actions. In representation, there must be a clear understanding of the group's needs regarding activities that can benefit them. According to Coutinho (2008),

> Modern freedom, on the contrary, consists of enjoying in the private sphere the goods that individuals obtain through their merits; for this purpose, "free" individuals appoint "representatives" who take care of the government and, therefore, are freer the less they participate in the public sphere. The distinction is not between ancient freedom and the freedom of the modern, [...] but somewhat between democratic freedom and liberal freedom [...] (COUTINHO, 2008, p. 3, our translation).

> Democratization has a universal value since what has universal value is not the concrete forms that democracy takes in specific historical contexts – forms that are always modifiable, constantly renewable, always subject to deepening – but what has universal value is this process of democratization, which is essentially expressed in increasing socialization of participation (COUTINHO, 2008, p. 8, our translation).

Similarly, the involved subjects must be immersed in a culture that allows them to choose policies that serve their interests and can be part of this decision-making process. Remembering that these subjects create the rules, "democratic culture can only emerge if the political society is conceived as an institutional construction [...]" (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 29, our translation).

Forms of Democracy: Direct Democracy and Representative Democracy

Bobbio (2009) believes that the individuals involved must be immersed in a culture that enables them to choose policies that cater to their interests and be part of this decision-making process. It is essential to remember that these individuals create the rules, "representative democracy and direct democracy are not two alternative systems (in the sense that one cannot exist where the other does), but rather two systems that complement each other" (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 65, our translation).

This need was also recognized by Rousseau, considered the father of modern democracy, when he stated about representative democracy that "sovereignty cannot be represented" and, therefore, "the English people believe themselves to be free, but they are sorely mistaken; they are free only during the election of members of parliament, and once these members are elected, they return to being slaves, nothing more" (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 53, our translation).

In direct democracy, all subjects are responsible for actively participating in the process of governmental decision-making, meaning that each individual has the opportunity to contribute with their opinions and votes in decisions. An example is the electoral process, in which no representative advocates for the group's interests, as all participants have an active role in the entire decision-making process.

People representing this type of democracy are called upon to make decisions on issues in which they often have some knowledge, and during discussions, they seek to reach a consensus to meet the group's needs. In this type of democracy, there is no intermediary in the deliberations. Bobbio (2009) describes this aspect as follows:

> For direct democracy to exist in the true sense of the word, that is, in the sense that the right means that the individual personally participates in the deliberations that concern them, there must be no intermediaries between the deliberating individuals and the considerations that worry them (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 63, our translation).

Direct democracy may have limitations, as not all participants possess the knowledge and clarity to make informed decisions. However, in this type of democracy, individuals have autonomy as they have the capacity to make individual decisions on specific issues presented to them. An example of this is the election for the presidency of Brazil. Bobbio (2009) emphasizes everyone's participation in direct democracy as follows:

> It is evident that if direct democracy means the participation of all citizens in all decisions that concern them, the proposal is impractical. For everyone to decide on everything in increasingly complex societies, such as modern industrial societies, is materially impossible. And it is also not humanly desirable, that is, from the perspective of humanity's ethical and intellectual development (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 54, our translation).

On the other hand, representative democracy is characterized by the election of a representative who deliberates on behalf of the community. In this model of democracy, the people elect representatives who make decisions regarding collective interests, regardless of the bodies in which these decisions will be made, as it is the representatives who have this role. In this sense, Bobbio (2009) observes that:

> Representatives called upon to represent general interests do not necessarily belong to the same class or professional category as those they represent (professional politicians), but if the goods are of a particular type, usually their representatives belong to the same category as their represented (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 59, our translation).

According to the author, it is in this context that modern democracy develops, with the people electing their representatives to make decisions that affect collective interests.

> Modern democracy, born as a representative democracy in contrast to the democracy of the ancients, should be characterized by political representation, meaning a form of expression in which the representative, called upon to pursue the interests of the nation, cannot be subject to a binding mandate (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 36, our translation).

Through discussions about democracy, it is understood that it is established in contemporary political theory, emphasizing how a political decision should be reached rather than what should be decided. In this sense, as many rules as necessary can be established to guide decisions in a democratic regime, but it is essential to consider the formulation of the content of these rules and how they are applied.

The expression "real democracy" or representative democracy in society generally means that deliberations affecting the community are not made directly by the individuals who compose it but rather by their elected representatives. These representatives may not belong to the same category as the represented or may have specific interests of a class, but they were elected to make decisions on behalf of certain social groups.

In real democracy, there is an imperative mandate, which means that the elected politician represents the entire community, including those who did not vote for them. In the words of Bobbio (2009):

> With this, I believe I have put myself in a position to specify in which sense the term "representation" is used when we say that a system is representative and when we commonly speak of representative democracy: the representative democracies that we know are democracies in which a representative is understood as a person who has two well-established characteristics: a) to the extent that they enjoy the trust of the electorate, once elected, they are no longer accountable to the voters themselves, and their mandate is therefore irrevocable; b) they are not directly accountable to their constituents precisely because they are called upon to safeguard the general interests of civil society and not the particular interests of this or that category (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 60, our translation).

Dahl (2001) identifies several criteria that characterize a natural democratic process in a representative government: (i) effective participation, (ii) equal voting, (iii) enlightened understanding, (iv) control of the agenda, and (v) inclusion of adults in democracy.

Effective participation implies that all members must have the opportunity to participate in collective decision-making, discuss and propose political issues, and have the

right to express their opinions, emphasizing that this applies to the inclusion of capable adults in decision-making.

Regarding equal voting, it is relevant to highlight that all representatives should have the same opportunity to make decision-making choices; therefore, their votes should be treated equally, respecting individual preferences. In the context of enlightened understanding, it becomes a fundamental element that the individuals involved in the decision-making process have clarity and mastery of the subject to be decided.

The emphasis on freedom and equality positions the democratic process as a means that enables more significant participation of individuals, fostering interaction in decision-making and determining which issues should or should not be decided, as well as where representatives can receive suggestions from the people and act on their behalf, thus making actions more effective.

Touraine (1996) highlights that democracy is a political struggle for ideas within a particular social group, providing complete freedom of participation to this group against the dominant logic of the State, where the principles proposed by Dahl (2009) can contribute.

> What defines democracy, therefore, is not only a set of institutional guarantees or the rule of the majority but, above all, respect for individual and collective projects that combine the affirmation of personal freedom with the right to identify with a particular social, national, or religious community. Democracy is not only based on laws but, above all, on a political culture. Democratic culture has often been defined by equality (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 26, our translation).

We can have the freedom and equality of participation in decision-making, but the ultimate decision will always be made by the majority over the minority. This is one of the fundamental issues of democracy, namely, the balance between the power of the majority and the rights of the minority must be respected, "We must stop rhetorically opposing the power of the majority to the rights of minorities. There is no democracy if these two elements are not respected" (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 29). The author further emphasizes:

> Democracy is the system in which the majority recognizes the rights of minorities because it acknowledges that the majority of today may become the minority tomorrow and be subject to a law that represents different interests. However, it will not deny them the exercise of their fundamental rights. The democratic spirit is based on this awareness of the interdependence of unity with diversity and is nurtured by a constant debate about the ever-moving boundary that separates one from the other and the best means to strengthen the association between them (TOURAINE, 1996, p. 29, our translation).

We are not questioning the final decisions of democracy here but rather the process through which it occurs. Democracy allows us the freedom to participate equally in the search for a decision. As Touraine (1996) states, democracy should not only serve society or individuals but both. In this context, democracy involves those who participate in the democratic process, allowing their opinions to contribute to and influence society. It is important to remember that this process occurs collectively.

The democratic process is related to desirable issues in the political context, aiming to serve society as a whole. This implies avoiding tyranny, seeking political equality, promoting freedom in discussions, pursuing the personal interests of specific social groups, and emphasizing individual autonomy.

According to Dahl (2001), providing individuals with the opportunity to live under laws of their choosing means:

> Ensuring that, before a law is enacted, all citizens have the opportunity to present their views.
> Providing everyone with guarantees of opportunities to discuss, deliberate, negotiate, and seek compromise solutions, which in the best circumstances could lead to a law that all will consider satisfactory.
> In the most likely case of unanimity being impossible to achieve, the law proposed by the most significant number will be enacted (DAHL, 2001, p. 67, our translation).

Based on these criteria, the process of understanding and presenting positions marks the participatory nature of the democratic procedure, as it, to some extent, achieves what is proposed as a natural democratic process. Individuals can only live under laws of their choosing to the capacity that they can express their stance on a law to be enacted.

Otherwise, they will live under laws they were not consulted on and be obliged to comply with imposed laws. Furthermore, other individuals must be guaranteed opportunities to voice opinions, ideas, and suggestions on rules that will affect their daily lives. In this decision-making context, the majority's decision should prevail when there is no consensus among the parties.

The political institutions of modern representative democracy, essential for a democratic government, often depend on the unit size required to satisfy the democratic process. Among their characteristics, as highlighted by Dahl (2001), are: (i) elected officials; (ii) free, fair, and frequent elections; (iii) freedom of expression; (iv) diverse sources of information; (v) autonomy for associations; (vi) inclusive citizenship.

According to the author, control over government policy decisions should maintain the effective participation of elected officials chosen by citizens for this purpose. Additionally, elections conducted by citizens should be free, fair, and frequent, ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities in this process, with equal votes and choices. Citizens should also have the right and freedom to express themselves without the risk of severe punishment on broadly defined political matters, including not only the right to be heard but also the right to listen to others and to criticize officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and prevailing ideology.

In this sense, individuals have the right to seek diverse and independent sources of information, promoting dialogue with other citizens, experts, newspapers, magazines, books, telecommunications, other means of communication, and freedom of expression, as described earlier.

To ensure these rights, including those necessary for the effective functioning of democratic political institutions, citizens also have the right to form relatively independent and autonomous associations or organizations, such as political parties and interest groups. It is essential that no adult with permanent residence in the country, subject to its laws, be denied the rights available to other citizens.

Limits of Democracy

Bobbio (2009) highlights six promises that have not been fulfilled (or have been distorted, as we can call them) concerning what was envisaged in the context of democracy over time, which we will refer to here as "limits of democracy." These limits are described as follows: (i) The birth of the pluralistic society; (ii) The revenge of interests; (iii) The persistence of oligarchies; (iv) The limited space; (v) The invisible power; (vi) The uneducated citizen.

Regarding the first limit, the birth of the pluralistic society, individuals within the democratic process have increasingly become groups, organizations, associations, parties with different ideologies, and fewer and fewer individuals. This contrasts with the original idea of democracy, which proposed a conception based on the individual, as pointed out by Bobbio (2009):

> Groups, not individuals, are the protagonists of political life in a democratic society, where there is no sovereign, people, or nation composed of individuals who have acquired the right to participate directly or indirectly in the government, where there is no longer the people as an ideal (or mystical)

> unity, but only the people divided in fact into opposing and competing groups, each with its relative autonomy from the central government (autonomy that individual persons have lost or have only had in an ideal model of democratic government always belied by the facts) (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 35, our translation).

As Touraine (1996) proposes, modern democracy today is an expression of groups.

Regarding the second limit, which refers to the "revenge of interests," Bobbio (2009) argues that this means democracy should be characterized by political representation, in which representatives serve the interests of the nation. However, often the opposite occurs, where representatives pursue their interests instead of the interests of the country for which they were elected:

> The principle on which political representation is based is the exact antithesis of the principle on which the representation of interests is based, in which the representative, in pursuit of the particulars of the represented, is subject to a binding mandate (typical of the contract of private law that provides for revocation for excess of mandate) (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 36, our translation).

Souza (2006) reinforces Bobbio's position when stating:

> If modern democracy was born representative, in which the representative is not a person subject to a binding mandate but becomes, once elected, a representative of the entire society, currently nothing is more absent than the idea of representing the entire collective, as representatives are increasingly bound to small groups and estates that elected them (SOUZA, 2006, p. 135, our translation).

The persistence of oligarchies, as the third limit proposed by Bobbio (2000), considers power restricted to a few individuals, exercised by a select few, i.e., a minimal social group that dominates all other social groups and holds the power of an elite, contradicting democratic principles. Real-world democracy has served to elect the elite that will govern and that, from time to time, is replaced by another elite. In this sense, Souza (2006) also highlights:

> If democracy emerged with the promise of overthrowing oligarchic power, it has long been possible to observe, in the best Schumpeterian style, that democracy is not the absence of elites but the presence of elites in the power struggle, through the legitimacy of the vote (SOUZA, 2006, p. 135, our translation).

Regarding the issue of limited space, the fourth limit highlighted by (2009), it is essential to understand what areas are guaranteed for democratic participation to occur, where

binding decisions for a social group are approved. One aims to perceive whether there has been a democratic development related to the occasions when individuals have the right to participate in decisions and where this occurs in a way that social requests can be guaranteed.

In this aspect, Souza (2006) agrees with Bobbio when describing that "democracy should be less concerned with the number of situations in which people vote, and more with the places where this is possible, that is, democracy has not occupied other spaces in social life other than government." Bobbio (2009) reinforces the above position:

> After the conquest of universal suffrage, if it is still possible to speak of an extension of the democratization process, it should not be so much in the transition from representative democracy to direct democracy, as is usually stated, but in the transition from political democracy to social democracy – not so much in the answer to the question 'Who votes?' but in the answer to this other question: 'Where do they vote?' In other words, when you want to know if there has been a development of democracy in a given country, the right thing to do is to find out if it has not increased the number of those entitled to participate in decisions that concern them, but the spaces in which they can exercise this right (BOBBIO, 2009, p. 40, our translation).

The fifth limit proposed by Bobbio (2009) is the invisible power, which he perceives as an unfulfilled promise in the democratic process, and he understands this power as actions taken away from the eyes of those interested, where decision-making is not made public for people to discuss. Thus, a move that remains secret is not only unjust but, if made public, could trigger reactions that would prevent its execution.

Souza (2006) observes that democracy promised to end this power, as it would establish a regime of publicizing government actions to control them, but what he perceives is that currently, the opposite occurs: the population does not control the government, but, with modern democracy, the government has the power to prevent the people.

The last limit of democracy proposed by Bobbio (2009) concerns the uneducated citizen. The author realizes that there is no education for the citizenship of individuals and that, for this education to exist, people should experience democratic practices. An example to consider is the political discussion among individuals, which allows for establishing relationships with different subjects from those who are part of their daily lives. Democracy was born articulated with education for citizenship through political education, and the more the population can participate, the more knowledge it will have about its rights and duties (SOUZA, 2006).

Final Considerations

Over time, the question of democracy as a form of government presents various conceptions and a significant trajectory about its objectives, especially in the political context. These spaces are considered local arenas of dispute in which groups or social movements can make decisions. Consequently, democracy can guarantee citizens' essential rights to construct a democratic process within these living spaces.

In this work, democracy is understood as a form of government based on a set of rules aimed at addressing the interests, claims, and rights of the people, either in a representative or direct manner. It establishes criteria for those authorized to make decisions and follows procedures that contrast with authoritarian forms of government, ensuring citizens a range of essential rights that autocratic systems do not provide.

As these criteria are effectively implemented within a democratic process, citizens will indeed be living under their chosen laws. In a democratic process, decisions are not made in isolation for a specific social group, as often, when we act as representatives in assemblies, it is necessary to deliberate, discuss, and make decisions that serve the interests of the entire group.

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CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: Not applicable.

Funding: Not applicable.

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval: It did not go through the ethics and research committee. It is a literature review study.

Data and material availability: Not applicable, as it is a literature review.

Authors' contributions: The authors are professors at the exact center of the university (CELA/UFAC) and collaborate on their writings as they discuss the article's topic. Due to the study group they are part of, they mutually contribute to the preparation of articles.