

SOBRE A EXPANSIVIDADE DA DEMOCRACIA: UMA PROPOSTA DE REINTERPRETAÇÃO DO MINIMALISMO DEMOCRÁTICO

SOBRE LA EXPANSIVIDAD DE LA DEMOCRACIA: UNA PROPUESTA DE REINTERPRETACIÓN DEL MINIMALISMO DEMOCRÁTICO

ON THE EXPANSIVITY OF DEMOCRACY: A PROPOSAL FOR REINTERPRETATION OF DEMOCRATIC MINIMALISM

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RESUMO: Este ensaio bibliográfico visa reconsiderar as proposições do minimalismo democrático de Joseph Schumpeter e, por meio desse exercício, examinar como seu núcleo conceitual se amplifica no efetivo funcionamento da democracia. Após uma breve síntese do minimalismo schumpeteriano, apresentamos algumas críticas que lhe foram direcionadas a partir dos anos 1960. Por fim, com base em O'Donnell, Saffon e Urbinati, propomos um alargamento do procedimentalismo de modo que este contemple uma dimensão normativa. Essa discussão teórico-conceitual, ainda que limitada, mostra-se relevante na atualidade em vista dos desafios colocados aos (às) cientistas sociais para identificar com rigor científico quais países são de fato democráticos – apesar de realizarem eleições regulares.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Teoria democrática. Minimalismo. Procedimentalismo. Representação política.

RESUMEN: Este ensayo bibliográfico visa reconsiderar las propociones del minimalismo democrático de Joseph Schumpeter y, por ese ejercicio, examinar como su núcleo conceptual se amplifica en el efetivo funcionamiento de la democracia. Tras una breve síntesis del minimalismo schumpeteriano, presentamos algunas críticas que le fueron direccionadas a partir de los años 1960. Por fin, basado en O'Donnell, Saffon e Urbinati, proponemos por una expansión del procedimentalismo de manera que éste contemple una dimensión normativa. Esa discusión teórico-conceptual, aunque limitada, se muestra relevante en la actualidad en vista de los desafíos colocados a las científicas y científicos sociales para identificar con rigor científico cuales países son efetivamente democráticos – pese a de realizaren turnos electorales regulares.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teoría democrática. Minimalismo. Procedimentalismo. Representación Política.

ABSTRACT: This bibliographic essay aims to reconsider the propositions of Joseph Schumpeter's democratic minimalism and, through this exercise, to examine how its conceptual core is amplified in the effective functioning of democracy. After a brief analysis of the schumpeterian minimalism, we present some criticisms that were directed to it from the 1960s

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onwards. Finally, based on O'Donnell, Saffon and Urbinati, we propose an extension of proceduralism so that it contemplates a normative dimension. This theoretical-conceptual discussion, however limited, is relevant today in the occasion of the challenges faced by social scientists to identify with scientific rigor which countries are indeed democratic – despite holding periodic elections.

KEYWORDS: *Democratic theory. Minimalism. Proceduralism. Political representation.*

Introduction²

A little over a decade ago, the discussion about the crisis of democracy and its concrete institutional effects has been strengthened. In this context, experts differ on when a particular regime ceased to be intrinsically democratic and what aspects were compromised to the point of making that country less liberal. The procedural parameter - basic consensus on the rules, maintenance of political institutions, clean and free elections - remains recurrent in several analyzes (GLASIUS, 2018). However, it is necessary to consider, beyond form, the content of democracy. After all, even the minimum criterion of elections demands the formation of a plural political society that gives conditions for this competition to take place fully, with broad civil and political freedoms. The measurement of what becomes or is not a democratic regime, therefore, goes through a qualitative assessment dependent on a denser concept of democracy.

Relating to the theoretical-conceptual basis of this debate, this essay aims to explore the argument that it is not possible to restrict the definition of democracy to the criterion of free electoral dispute between elites by refraining from the requirements for the effectiveness of this competition. Even those authors who have at some point identified with democratic minimalism come to recognize at the same time that “the term democracy has... not only a descriptive or denotative function, but also... normative and persuasive” (SARTORI, 1994, p. 24). It is therefore necessary to admit that even the narrowest definitions allow the expansion of what is meant by democratic society in terms of values and freedoms. This opens the possibility of a strong understanding of citizenship as unfolding from the very core of minimalist propositions.

The text is divided into two parts. In the first section, I seek to briefly characterize democratic minimalism using Schumpeter's (1961) formulations. In the following part, I

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address some criticisms that have been made of this minimal definition and opening points for a broader understanding of democracy from proceduralism - favoring in particular the arguments of Walker (1966), Pateman (1992), O'Donnell (1999), Saffon and Urbinati (2013). The concluding remarks summarize the arguments presented and signal why democracies today cannot be evaluated according to a narrow reading of Schumpeterian-based minimalism.

Schumpeterian democratic minimalism

Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1883-1950) was an Austrian author who became especially famous in the area of economics, dealing with topics such as development and the role of entrepreneurs in economic dynamics. In **Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy**, originally published in 1942, the author stopped to study socialism or, more specifically, how the successful development of capitalism would give way to this form of organization of society (SWEDBERG, 2003).

In the following decades, however, the work would emerge as a reference in the field of political science for its considerations about the concept of democracy, beyond criticism of what he classified as his "classical theory". Thus, its purpose was to develop a realistic theory of the democratic process that emphasized the struggle for political power. Given the context in which the author wrote, and the criticism he has written, one can understand his emphasis on the impossibility and incompetence of citizens to participate in politics and, more than that, the danger that such involvement would pose, given the events leading up to the Second World War (1939-1945) - especially in Germany and Italy. Over the years his formulations would find echo in research conducted in the United States that showed an electorate poorly informed or able to make decisions. Studies headed by political scientists such as Angus Campbell, Philip Converse and Paul Lazarsfeld (MIGUEL, 2014), among others, argued that this was not a problem for democracy - on the contrary, it guaranteed its stability.

Considering Schumpeter's fundamental work, and more specifically what he wrote about democracy, the starting point is a mental experiment: would it be a country that democratically decides to persecute Christians, witches and Jews, a democratic State? "Would we approve of a democratic constitution that would produce such results rather than an undemocratic one that would avoid them?" (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 296). Such questions serve as a basis for advancing his argument that the democratic method does not necessarily encompass any content or ideals. It is just "a political method, that is, a certain kind of

institutional arrangement to arrive at a political decision (legislative or administrative) and therefore unable to be an end in itself, unrelated to the decisions it will produce under certain historical conditions” (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 296-297). For the Austrian, democracy does not produce the same effects in all historical places and times, but is linked to the particularities of a context. There is no problem, for example, that a particular political community imposes restrictions on a portion of the population with regard to voting: what constitutes the 'people' is best determined by society itself, since they all have some form of restriction (age, due to psychic disability), and it is unwise to compare them.

What then would be the government of the people? On the one hand Schumpeter points out that no form of government, whether a monarchy or dictatorship, can completely ignore the opinions of its people and remain stable - every ruler somehow contemplates the wills of his subjects, that is, a government for the people. It will not necessarily be a government by the people, which requires a distinction. On the other hand, it is perfectly conceivable that the people will govern as such in a small and undifferentiated community. However, as the territorial extent, number of people, and interests involved in community affairs grow, it is technically impossible for there to be a 'government of the people' in the real sense of the term. Schumpeter's solution to such a problem is to define the people's government as the government approved or authorized by the people. Thus “the people never govern, but they can always govern by definition” (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 301), and it is not appropriate to associate democracy with a specific configuration, such as direct democracy - as there are so many other forms of participation and influence of citizens in public affairs. Such a definition, according to his argument, would satisfy even those who define democracy more substantively by listing its virtues with regard to the common good of the community.

Having defined democracy as a method for political decision-making and the rule of the people as being authorized by the citizens by vote, the Austrian criticizes what he calls the 'classical theory' of democracy. His attack focuses mainly on questioning the concepts of common good and common will, which ascribe an unrealistic character to political representation and decision making in a society. Schumpeter (1961) argues that there is no common good that is equivalent to the entire population of a community. In this sense, people may have different conceptions of the good that they believe are best for the community, and this is not easily compatible. Also, even if there is agreement on a particular conception of the good, the way in which it can be reached or the appropriate solution can differ between people. Consequently, one cannot speak of a general will, as it requires a common understanding of what is best for the community - individual wills may not converge to a general will.

The attack on the classical theory of democracy is also made by questioning individual political rationality. In this sense Schumpeter states that:

[...] we are still bound by practical necessity to give the will of the individual an independence and rational quality that are absolutely unrealistic. To argue that the will of the citizen *per se* is a political factor worthy of respect, that will must, first of all, exist. Or rather, it must be something more than an indeterminate set of vague impulses, loosely circling slogans and erroneous impressions (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 309).³

This identifies a limited ability of citizens themselves to make informed decisions on political issues without external influence - by charisma, group pressure or propaganda. And even if this capacity existed, it would be difficult to compose what qualifies as a general will - in the sense of leading to a satisfactory action that addresses the different understandings of the issue. The assumption of these formulations is that there is a 'political human nature' that restricts the ability of individuals to make rational judgments about the politics of a community. At this point Schumpeter was informed by political psychology and Le Bon's considerations of mass behavior. In short, "the typical citizen... goes down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political realm... becomes primitive again. His thought assumes the purely associative and affective character" (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 320). Attacking classical theory, as it is called and defined, is also equals to attacking the assumption that citizens are able to deliberate and make political decisions together - which he classifies as a 'fiction' (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 323) -, attributing this inability to an inherent quality of the human being.

If the so-called classical theory of democracy puts the election of representatives in the background and focus on the ability of citizens to think clearly and rationally about political issues, Schumpeter seeks to reverse this relationship and to give the voter only the function of forming governments. In his definition, "the democratic method is an institutional system for political decision-making, in which the individual acquires the power to decide through a competitive struggle for the voter's votes" (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 328). Such a definition would have, among others, the following advantages: highlighting the role of the government leader, which is omitted in classical theory; not neglecting organized collective interests - which express their will through specific guidelines recognized by the representatives; establish a

³ [...] ficamos ainda obrigados por necessidade prática a atribuir à vontade do *indivíduo* uma independência e uma qualidade racional que são absolutamente irrealistas. Para argumentar que a vontade do cidadão *per se* é um fator político digno de respeito, essa vontade deve, em primeiro lugar, existir. Ou melhor, deve ser algo mais do que um conjunto indeterminado de impulsos vagos, circulando frouxamente em torno de slogans e impressões errôneas (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 309).

clearer link between democracy and individual freedoms - the struggle for power provides for the extension of freedoms, even if it does not guarantee them; clarify the role of citizens in electing the government rather than forcing it or guiding it to make certain decisions. "The principle of democracy, then, only means that the reins of government should be handed over to those with greater support than other competing individuals or groups" (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 332), which excludes the need to adopt principles, such as proportional representation.

This theoretical construction then converges on aspects that would shape the mainstream of contemporary political science, namely, the role of parties, the political dispute and the professionalization of elites. According to Schumpeter (1961), the primary objective of parties is to electorally win and to gain or retain power. Their role is to draft, pass laws, and adopt administrative procedures insofar as this ensures their success in the electoral dispute - in short, they are not elected to make laws, but make laws to be elected. Another important function of the party is to mobilize citizens in electoral periods by setting political agendas and programs - the people are not mobilized by themselves but are mobilized by elites. In short, parties do not serve to promote the common good as supposedly postulated by classical theory: "the party is a group whose members decide to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power" (SCHUMPETER, 1961, p. 344). To the extent that the people are not capable of any action other than the 'stampede of cattle', it is up to the parties to mobilize it through propaganda and political agenda - and here the party leader has a central role. For all this, Schumpeter understands that political activity, to be satisfactory, must have a professional dimension and conform as a career. Adept of the liberal, albeit elitist, aspect, the Austrian recommends the formation of a quality political and bureaucratic class that conducts public affairs prudently and without interfering too much with society. In this context, the representatives must be completely independent, and the people have only the function of reelecting or not the group that holds the power.

In short, Schumpeter laid the foundations of what would eventually conform as minimalism in political theory. In this conception, democracy is a political method for decision-making, a procedural arrangement free of normativity or ultimate goal. Democratic government is based on authorizing citizenship, so that a restricted and qualified political group independently represents it in the conduct of public affairs. There is therefore a clear 'division of political work' between elites and the general population, given the supposed inability of the latter to deliberate and formulate coherent proposals. If the disqualification of citizens subsequently diminished, the centrality of studies of parties and institutions remained in the discipline of political science. In the next section, I will raise some counterpoints and criticisms

of Schumpeter's postulated minimalism, and some developments that go beyond its conceptual core.

The critique of minimalism and its extrapolation

Much of what was discussed about the concept and practice of democracy in later decades, especially from the 1950s and 1960s, referred to Schumpeter's formulations, whether in favorable or critical analysis. Since then the literature has expanded greatly, with theoretical and empirical studies that dealt with democracy in its most different dimensions. It is not possible to exhaust in this space the discussion about the unfolding of minimalism in contemporary democratic theory, I discuss in this section about two striking criticisms directed at this conception by Jack Walker (1966) and Carole Pateman (1992). Next, from the formulations of Guillermo O'Donnell (1999), Maria Saffon and Nadia Urbinati (2013), I intend to advance the argument that even according to the parameters of minimalism democracy implies guarantees that go beyond the fundamental core of this theoretical stem.

By the 1960s it was possible to see that the mainstream of political science, largely from the United States, had conformed to what was termed democratic minimalism. Following the unfolding of criticism of the so-called 'classical theory', and the search for more 'realistic' ways of defining and measuring democracy, what Walker (1966) described as the elitist theory of democracy was configured. According to this perspective, as we saw in Schumpeter (1961), the emphasis is on the formation (elections) and functioning (administration and public policies) of governments, which are based on efficiency and stability as the maximum values. Thus, the effective participation of citizens in public affairs and the consensus in society on the democratic method and the policies implemented is discarded in favor of the "elite consensus", in which politicians and stakeholders engage in dialogue and agree to maintain democratic structure in order to maintain their positions vis-à-vis other groups (WALKER, 1966, p. 287). In such configuration public apathy, far from being a problem, is a virtue that aids in the stability of the system, enabling the peaceful continuity of the political dispute and the adoption of necessary measures by the government. Thus, according to Walker (p. 288), "in the elitist version of the theory... the emphasis shifted to the needs and functions of the system as a whole; there is no longer a direct concern for human development", depleting democracy from the political ideals proposed by classical theorists.

Thus Walker's critique focuses mainly on the normative implications of elitist theory and its inadequacy to the political events in the United States at the time of his writing. On the one hand, elitist theorists ignore the fact that the classical theory - which associates authors of the most diverse tendencies in the same vein, which in itself is problematic as we shall see below - is a utopian perspective, which was not intended to deal with how the policy works. In seeking to bring these formulations closer to what they observed in practice, the elitist authors "transformed democracy from a radical doctrine into a conservative one, removing its distinctive emphasis on popular political activity" and compromised its normative foundation (WALKER, 1966, p. 288). And, in doing so, they narrowed the critical potential of democratic theory, which has effects on the very assessment of democracy that citizens realize. On the other hand, given its emphasis on the stability of the political system, elitist theory tends to naturalize and make citizens' apathy towards politics desirable. By making a contingent element common, and using it to explain how democracy benefits from it, the inequalities in society and the indifference and dissatisfaction of citizens about politics are obscured. The suppression of conflict made possible by a consensual democratic model, carried out by elites and interest groups, does not necessarily eliminate the dissent present in society, as the author himself notes regarding the protests made by black people between 1964 and 1965 in the United States.

From these arguments it is possible to see how the disregard of elitist theory for the citizenship aspect is far from guaranteeing 'realism' to its formulations. While the authors of this strand were largely concerned about the detrimental effects of broad citizen participation in public affairs and the resulting conflicts, attaching great importance to the role of political leaders in the administration and maintenance of the democratic system, it must be recognized that a perception of policy in which citizens influence only marginally and do not get involved (or should get involved) is unrealistic (WALKER, 1966). The very institutional configuration of the United States, for example, shows that there are considerable restrictions on the behavior of political elites and that they cannot act without weighing the interests present in society. More importantly, however, the adoption of various policies can be explained by pressures from citizens in the form of social movements. These, according to the author, attribute a dynamic aspect to the political system, preventing it from stabilizing and ceasing to produce transformations. Thus, conflict, far from being a threat to democracy, "is a great source of change and innovation" (WALKER, 1966, p. 295). In short, the elitist perspective adopts unjustified distrust of citizens' potential and, by attaching such importance to political elites, compromises the normative aspect of democracy and favors the *status quo*. Moreover, in naturalizing and making political apathy desirable, this strand proves to be an inadequate guide

to the study of US political events in the 1960s, for example. The examination of democracy in its different dimensions, especially with regard to the inequalities present in societies, requires a broadening of the perspective adopted by researchers, beyond what is proposed by elitist theorists.

Another author who made scathing criticism of democratic minimalism was Pateman (1992), in her study of participation from political theory. The author begins her study characterizing Schumpeter's democratic theory and problematizing among other things his “mental experiment”, which “conflicts with the necessary rules of procedure if we want to call the political method of the country 'democratic'” (PATEMAN, 1992, p. 12) based on Peter Bachrach. Other criticisms are directed at reducing policy to selecting the most prepared elites to govern - which does not necessarily mean broad freedom for any citizen to run for leadership - and weakening the participatory aspect of citizens, which is reduced to voting and discussion - no attempt should be made to influence representatives beyond the decision to approve or reject a party by voting. As Pateman demonstrates, such formulations have significantly pervaded the studies of democracy by Berelson, Dahl, Sartori, and Eckstein, which, among others, make up what she classifies as a contemporary theory of democracy:

In this theory, “democracy” is linked to a political method or series of institutional arrangements at the national level. The characteristic democratic element of the method is the competition among the leaders (elite) for the votes of the people in periodic and free elections. Elections are crucial to the democratic method because it is mainly through them that the majority can exercise control over the leaders. The reaction of the leaders to the claims of non-elite members is held in the first place by sanctioning the loss of office in the elections; Leaders' decisions can also be influenced by active groups, which push in the periods between elections... Finally, “participation”, for the majority, constitutes participation in the choice of decision-makers. Therefore, the function of participation in this theory is for protection only; the protection of the individual against the arbitrary decisions of elected leaders and the protection of their private interests. It is in the realization of this objective that the justification of the democratic method lies (PATEMAN, 1992, p. 25).⁴

⁴ Nessa teoria, a “democracia” vincula-se a um método político ou uma série de arranjos institucionais a nível nacional. O elemento democrático característico do método é a competição entre os líderes (elite) pelos votos do povo, em eleições periódicas e livres. As eleições são cruciais para o método democrático, pois é principalmente através delas que a maioria pode exercer controle sobre os líderes. A reação dos líderes às reivindicações dos que não pertencem à elite é segurada em primeiro lugar pela sanção da perda do mandato nas eleições; as decisões dos líderes também podem sofrer influências de grupos ativos, que pressionam nos períodos entre as eleições [...] Finalmente, “participação”, no que diz respeito à maioria, constitui a participação na escolha daqueles que tomam as decisões. Por conseguinte, a função da participação nessa teoria é apenas de proteção; a proteção do indivíduo contra as decisões arbitrárias dos líderes eleitos e a proteção de seus interesses privados. É na realização desse objetivo que reside a justificação do método democrático (PATEMAN, 1992, p. 25).

But the central aspect of his critique of Schumpeterian minimalism, and also to all who have mirrored his categorization of the so-called 'classical theory', is the realization that there is a classical theory of democracy. Thus, according to Pateman (1992), it is a *myth of classical theory*, since none of the aforementioned contemporary authors sought to thoroughly investigate what classical theorists postulated about democracy. Schumpeter (1961), for example, does not mention names when he deals with the concepts of the common good and common will and when he refers to this theory as individualistic, utilitarian, and elaborated in the eighteenth century. Based on these indications, the author comes to the names “of Rousseau, both Mills, and Bentham, who in fact deserve the title of 'classic' democracy theorists” (PATEMAN, 1992, p. 29).

What is noticeable is that not only the characterization of the ideas of these authors is erroneous in Schumpeter's work, but it is not possible to unite their different perspectives under a single label. While James Mill and Bentham were particularly concerned with the "institutional arrangements" (PATEMAN, 1992, p. 32) of the political system, giving to participation only a protective aspect - ensuring that the "universal interests" of the community would not be dismissed by the representatives - Stuart Mill and Rousseau emphasized participation as a broader aspect, “fundamental for the establishment and maintenance of the democratic State, considered not only as a set of national representative institutions, but as what I have called a participatory society” (PATEMAN, 1992, p. 33). In the course of her work, Pateman showed how participation can be understood from these last two authors as an element capable of developing the social and political capacities of citizens, not just a method to arrive at political decisions.

From the criticism of Walker and Pateman, we can see the problems and limits of minimalism as proposed by Schumpeter. It must be acknowledged that the Austrian was somewhat selective in his criticism of people's ability to deliberate rationally about public affairs. It also gave rise to the understanding that there are political 'experts' and that people should totally alienate decisions to them without questioning their possible interests and class ties - as if it could be conceived that someone legislates or rules by themselves, or that politics is a technical matter. Schumpeter, too, was quite conservative and prejudiced in defending elitism over popular participation, and the realism attributed to his theory regarding the lack of interest or inability of citizens to understand public affairs can be questioned - just by closing the eyes to the latent conflicts and social inequalities it would be possible to postulate such realism. Added to this, that political practice in democracies demonstrates that the population does not remain inert to everything imposed and maintains influence over its representatives by

other means and forms of organization. All this taken into account, however, it can be argued that even the minimum parameters set by the author require more than what is put into his theory.

In this sense, argues O'Donnell (1999) when he points out that if Schumpeter recognizes that there is a link between the 'competition for leadership' and the 'legal and moral principles of the community' in question, a door opens so the minimalist definitions implies in other substantive qualities to this regime⁵. It is therefore understood that just the fact that there is political competition for the vote, in which political elites have the role of mobilizing the masses and building political programs to which the latter can adhere, presupposes the existence of basic freedoms such as freedom of expression⁶. In short, "an elitist definition of democracy is not necessarily minimalist" (O'DONNELL, 1999, n. p.). Political competition, which occurs over time because of the possibility of both authorizing and rejecting a government, implies "the existence of additional conditions" (n. p.). A whole range of minimalist writers such as Przeworski and Huntington present, even if implicitly, definitions of democracy that imply the substantive existence of civil and political freedoms for this regime to be effective.

Even the 'minimalist', 'proceduralist' or 'schumpeterian' definitions, which merely refer to competitive elections as the only characteristic feature of democracy, presuppose the existence of some basic freedoms, or guarantees, for such elections to exist. Thus, such definitions are not, and could not be, minimalist or proceduralist, as they say (O'DONNELL, 1999, s. P.).⁷

Such an interpretation of Schumpeter's minimalism and propositions opens the way for O'Donnell to analyze the institutional developments in the existence of free and competitive elections and the guarantees and freedoms of political action that underpin them. For the author, on such grounds, a comprehensive theory of democracy would also have to include "aspects of the theory of law", the legal framework that "determines and supports fundamental characteristics of democracy", and therefore take into account the specificities of State in which the regime develops (O'DONNELL, 1999, n. p.). According to this understanding, democracy comes from the conformation of political institutions, based on the consideration and decisions

⁵ Miguel (2014, p. 60) makes a comment analogous to the perspective adopted here: "And, as Guillermo O'Donnell (1999, p. 582-8) sought to show, even the minimal conception of democracy in Schumpeter eventually demands such freedoms and rights [of conscience, expression, press, association, manifestation, movement, etc.], as a logical consequence of their postulation".

⁶ And, eliminating the assumption that only a few people are qualified to run for election and to govern, these freedoms become even more important and substantive for the entire population.

⁷ Até as definições 'minimalistas', 'processualistas' ou 'schumpeterianas', que se limitam a mencionar as eleições competitivas como único elemento característico da democracia, pressupõem a existência de algumas liberdades básicas, ou garantias, para que essas eleições existam. Sendo assim, tais definições não são, nem poderiam ser, minimalistas ou processualistas, como se dizem (O'DONNELL, 1999, s. p.).

taken by a particular society, which establish the legal parameters that govern it with respect to the rights and obligations of citizens. For the latter to have the capacity to realize their rights in this community - as the author conceives by the concept of agency - and for a legal framework to exist that “supports the legal norms that correspond to the existence and persistence of a democratic regime”, an effective state structure that promotes such principles is needed - factors that vary depending on the location and time under consideration. From a really minimalist conception of democracy could not derive an equivalent interpretation, given the emphasis on electoral competition as a sufficient condition of democracy. It is therefore not feasible to close the definition at this point, and therefore we might even say that the normative component of the democratic method cannot be completely abandoned either.

Realizing that the classical definition of minimalism is insufficient to account for democratic systems as they conform today, and that the normative justification of democracy should not be abandoned, some authors have recently worked for a broader understanding of proceduralism. Such is the case with Saffon and Urbinati (2013), who argue that voting and discussion rights are not sufficient to guarantee freedom of participation. It is necessary to fully promote basic civil, political and social rights so that everyone can have equal conditions to participate in public affairs. It is not difficult to understand the convergence of proceduralism's defense with Urbinati's theory of political representation (2006): representative institutions do not end in themselves, but rather promote a political process in which citizens have the possibility to debate ideas and present their conceptions. Therefore, representation “designates a form of political process that is structured in terms of the circularity between institutions and society”. Politics, therefore, does not end in the act of authorization/election, but is in constant (re)construction through a “communicative current between civil and political society” (URBINATI, 2006, p. 24).

In their article, Saffon and Urbinati (2013) seek to differentiate proceduralism, as they argue, from three perspectives adopted today: the epistemic conception of democracy, populism and Schumpeterian minimalism. Turning to their analysis of this latter conception, the authors point out, based on Przeworski, that Schumpeter's concept of democracy, while minimalist, “involves a normative dimension” (2013, p. 455), even if it is to replace the violent conflict with the electoral dispute. Nor is it possible to dismiss the influence of political liberalism on the conception of democracy, and more specifically how broad political freedom imposes limits on the manifestation of political power by institutions - an element little considered by the minimalist authors (SAFFON; URBINATI, 2013). By shaping a political society in which different groups compete electorally, minorities can also insert themselves and seek

participation in government. And the dynamic between situation and opposition - considering the possibility that the current majority will be a minority after the next elections - imposes limits on the power of rulers. Thus we realize that when we put the basic institutions of democracy to work they tend to have a multiplier effect: “democracy is therefore expansive in nature” (SAFFON; URBINATI, 2013, p. 458).

Thus, proceduralism as proposed by the authors, although it is largely concerned with the procedures and the extent to which the rules are being adhered to, does not abandon the normative value of democracy and does not dismiss its influence on the expansion of rights and the expansion of freedom and ability of the citizens to participate politically. Uncertainty (as to the possible outcome of the elections); openness and contestation (possibility of competition between two or more political conceptions and neither advocating the elimination of the others); participation (not only of political elites, but of citizens in general, in a continuous flow between institutions and society); and responsiveness (even if the majority rule is applied, minority interests are also considered in political decisions) are some of the characteristics of the political process as conformed to this conception (SAFFON; URBINATI, 2013).

Final considerations

This essay sought to challenge the idea that Schumpeterian-based proceduralism is sufficient for a satisfactory definition of democratic government. This was done from a brief characterization of democratic minimalism, going through the limits of such strand and, finally, possible opening points from the minimum criteria for holding elections. As demonstrated by Walker (1966), O'Donnell (1999), Saffon and Urbinati (2013), when we consider the political systems dynamically and the historical influences that shaped what appears today as democracy, it is not possible to reduce their definition of institutional aspects and the power struggle between elites. Even those theorists who fall within the proceduralist matrix have recently promoted a review of the criteria that define representative government. This initiative led to the construction of a broader understanding of what is defined by democracy and its variables.

Such a theoretical-conceptual discussion is far from superfluous in the current context of democratic recession in the world. How can we evaluate the political dynamics in each country, the actions of state officials or actors, and rigorously ascertain whether those regimes have become less democratic? As can be deduced from Glasius's (2018, p. 519) exposition “an

excessive focus on elections” can obscure the identification of authoritarian and anti-liberal tendencies, i.e., the definition of democracy and its variables is of utmost importance. It is necessary to understand how certain policies limit access to government information, the ability to report violations and also the propensity of marginalized or targeted groups - black people, indigenous people, LGBTs and women - to fight for their rights. Such aspects can only be satisfactorily assessed if we move away from the procedures and observe governmental practices and the political-societal process at both regional and national levels.

In the face of the growing discredit of the political class and institutions towards the citizens and the rise of right-wing leaders to power, it is urgent that social scientists go beyond Schumpeterian matrix proceduralism and aspects that end in the study of rules and institutional dispute. Not only from the scientific point of view, as it precludes a proper assessment of contemporary democratic regimes, but also so that the knowledge produced by their disciplines is able to make a contribution to those actors and actresses who exercise citizenship. More than ever, along with the praise of political pluralism in society, we must also foster interdisciplinary perspectives that break the dichotomy between civil society and the State.

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