



CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: A SARTORIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the concept of deliberative democracy by using Giovanni Sartori's methodological framework. Sartori's approach to concept analysis can be used to understand the concept of deliberative democracy in contemporary political theory. Because of the overwhelming literature on the concept of democracy, we don't have unambiguous meanings of deliberative democracy which one can use in comparative political discourses and methods. The aim of this paper is to disambiguate and clarify the concept of deliberative democracy with the help of Sartori's approach to concept formation and analysis. Conceptualization, Sartori argues, is intrinsically a qualitative exercise that is indispensable not merely for the intelligibility of empirical data but also for the meaningful rigorous research activity in social sciences. Furthermore, theorizing is only possible when we are clear about the concepts involved in the theory.

Key Words: Deliberative Democracy, Sartori, Conceptualization, Qualitative Analysis

Introduction

Sartori's approach for concept analysis can be used to understand the concept of deliberative democracy in contemporary political theory. Democracy itself is a contested concept and remains ambiguous in political analysis specifically when we study different regime types in various socio-cultural contexts. The conceptual analysis of deliberative democracy is significant from two perspectives: (a) It is important in order to develop a comprehensive theory of deliberative



democracy in contemporary political theory stemming from Rawls and Habermas. (b) It is necessary for comparative politics where the application of deliberative democracy in non-Western contexts is becoming important due to the process of globalization.

This paper is divided into three parts. Part 1 deals with the explication of Sartori's method for concept analysis. Part 2 deals with the application of Sartori's methodological framework for the analysis and clarification of the concept of deliberative democracy in current political theory. The last part concludes this paper with the reflections and significance of Sartori's approach to political theory.

1- Sartori's Methodological Framework for Concept Analysis

In what follows, I will explain Sartori's methodological framework for concept analysis that will be used to elucidate the conceptual analysis of deliberative democracy in the third section. Sartori's approach can be divided into three different levels:

1.1- Defining the Concepts

According to Sartori, we should always begin our research by specifying and defining the concepts. For Sartori, the concept is the '*basic unit of thinking*' and '*we have concept of A (or of A-ness) when we are able to distinguish A from whatever is not-A*' (Sartori, 1984). He distinguishes between empirical and theoretical concepts. We specify empirical concepts on the basis of observation and theoretical concepts are mainly grounded in abstract thinking and speculation. Sartori gives examples of 'structure' as a theoretical concept and 'legislature' as an empirical concept. Both empirical and theoretical concepts are shaped by and derive their meaning from theory. Sartori builds on Lazarsfeld's and Barton's approach to qualitative analysis and contends that quantification, measurement, and comparison always come after the process of concept formation. It means we must first know and define what we are going to measure. Thus, concept formation necessarily precedes quantification. For Sartori, this logic is applicable to both dependent and independent variables. Furthermore, given this nexus between concept formation and quantification, the 'what-is' question is more primordial than the 'how-much' question because the former helps us to define a concept while the latter makes measurement possible.

1.2- Classes and Comparisons in Research

Sartori claims that questions which deal with 'more and less' measurements and comparisons are secondary and can only be dealt with within the same class and category: '*quantification enters the scene after, and only after, having formed the concept*' (Sartori, 1970). That is to say, the definition and classification of a concept is always a qualitative enterprise where theory and language play key roles. Measurement or the process of quantification merely deals with and takes place within the same class which is being specified by the concept. This type of classification is



called taxonomy and is based upon the principle of *per genus et differentiam*. According to this principle, we can define an object by:

- (a) The class of objects where it belongs- *Genus*
- (b) The peculiar properties and attributes which make it distinct from all rest of the objects in the same class- *Differentiam*

According to Lazarsfeld and Barton, classification has two significant characteristics (Lazarsfeld, and Allen 1951),

- (a) Exclusive: The same object or phenomenon cannot pertain to more than one class
- (b) Exhaustive: No object or phenomenon can be put aside from the classification on the reasons that it does not belong to any of the given classes.

For example, if we classify different forms of cabinet government in modern Europe, we can make the following four distinctions:

- (a) Majority single-party governments
- (b) Majority coalition governments
- (c) Minority single-party governments
- (d) Minority coalitions

This classification is exclusive in the sense that no government can belong to more than one of the above four categories and exhaustive in the sense that no government can be left out of these four categories.

1.3- The Ladder of Abstraction

The third element in Sartori's concept analysis is known as the ladder of abstraction or the ladder of generality. For Sartori, when we define concepts by using a large number of properties, we ultimately limit their application, thereby such concepts lie at the bottom of the ladder. When we define concepts by using one or two properties, we make them abstract which widens their range of application. Such concepts, according to Sartori lie at the top of the ladder. In this way, the ladder of abstraction represents the hierarchy of concepts and categories. For example, the regime is a more abstract category than democracy or non-democracy because the former has fewer properties than the latter two, thus it lies at the top of the ladder. For Sartori, the ladder of abstraction can also be conceived as a matrix form, '*whereby there is a trade-off between the number of cases to be researched and the number of properties or attributes belonging to each case*' (Mair, 2008). It means, that when we have a large number of cases then we can only observe fewer properties, thereby we deal with a more abstract concept. When we have a small number of cases then we can observe more properties, thereby we deal with a more concrete concept. Sartori draws from the tradition of classical logic and uses the terms 'intension' and 'extension' in order to refer to these two dimensions of the concept and its matrix form: '*The extension of a concept refers to the range of cases it covers, or its denotation; the intension of a concept refers to the number of attributes or properties that it has, or its connotation*' (Mair, 2008). One can take the



example of the concept of a political party to show how the ladder of abstraction actually works in the research process. The minimal definition of a political party, according to Sartori, is 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or unfree), candidates for public office'(Sartori, 1976). Being a minimal definition, it has one property and a wide range of applications. It lies at the top of the ladder of abstraction and embraces almost all parties in various polities whether they are democratic or not. Furthermore, it has minimal intension and thus maximal extension and is very useful to make the distinction between political parties and interest groups. Methodologically, as we go further down the ladder of abstraction, the different definitions of subcategories of the political party get hold of more properties that also minimize the level of generality in terms of their application, thus they become more intensive and less extensive. In other words, intension and extension are inversely related, the more intensive a definition becomes the less extension it carries. The following two diagrams give us a comprehensive summary of Sartori's ladder of abstraction and the trade-off between cases and properties which we can use in the actual research process.

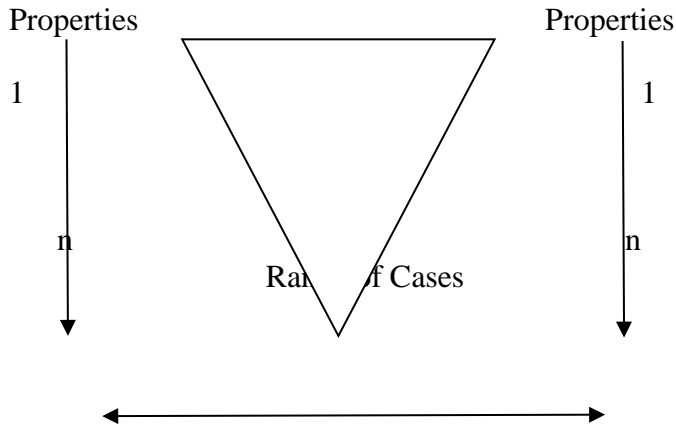
Sartori's Ladder of Abstraction

Levels of Abstraction	Major Comparative Scope and Purpose	Logical Properties of Concept
<i>High-Level Categories</i> Universal conceptualizations	<i>Global Theory</i> Cross-area comparisons among heterogeneous contexts	<i>Maximal Extension,</i> Minimal intension
<i>Medium-Level Categories</i> General conceptualizations and taxonomies	<i>Middle-Range Theory</i> Intra-area comparisons among relatively homogenous contexts	<i>Extension and Intention</i> In balance
<i>Low-Level Categories</i> Configurative Conceptualizations	<i>Narrow-Gauge Theory</i> Country-by-country analysis	<i>Minimal Extension</i> Maximal intention

Source: Sartori (1970: 1044)



The Trade-off between Cases and Properties



The above diagrams show that when we go away from the extremes and conduct research in the middle layers, we get to know plausible and interesting concepts both in empirical and theoretical contexts.

1.4- Implications in Research

There are three lessons one can learn from Sartori's ladder of abstraction and trade-offs between cases and properties that are viable for the conduct of research:

- (a) When one goes up the ladder of abstraction, the comparison across different classes is always affected. We can compare democracies with democracies at one level and in order to compare democracies with non-democracies we have to go up the ladder and deal with the more abstract concept of regime.
- (b) Concepts are data containers and include various attributes and properties. Concepts have three aspects: (1) The extension- phenomenon to be defined (2) The intension- properties and attributes that define the phenomenon (3) The label- term/word that covers both extension and intension.
- (c) We can always widen the realm of application of a particular concept by making it more abstract and lighter. In order to do so, we must drop a few of its properties and attributes.

2- Conceptual Analysis of Deliberative Democracy

Despite the rise of democracy all over the world in the post-Cold War era there has been growing skepticism about its efficacy. Currently, there are many democracies that are considered to be flawed in terms of assuring good governance; particularly in the non-western hemisphere (Democracy index, (2014). The dismal performance of young democracies and the success of some



authoritarian regimes like China and Gulf states in terms of development have posed serious challenges to the cause of democracy promotion (Saxer, 2009). Economist Intelligence Unit in its 2014 report observed a reversal of democratic indicators in Latin America, Central Africa, and the Middle East. It also observes the rise of discontent within Western Europe and North America due to multiple issues among which economic challenges are the most significant (Democracy index, 2014). The growing indifference of the masses towards the cause of democracy raises serious questions about the potential of democracy in terms of the delivery of services and assuring the prosperity of people. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, it became quite evident that the democratic process in the USA has been hijacked by paid lobbyists who work to promote the interests of a few individuals instead of the greater public good.

Notwithstanding the general decline of trust in democracy there are some defenders of democracy who are still optimistic about its future. They seek substantive reforms by making the democratic process as participatory as possible. Deliberative democracy is one such notion that calls for increased inclusivity in the democratic process by promoting reasoned discussion among dissenting factions of society (Cooke, 2000). Right from its inception, democracy carried the element of deliberation, but the scope of participation remained limited. Historical traces of the notion of deliberation can be found in the writings of Aristotle where he suggested that prudent decisions are reached after rational discussion among citizens. However, during the times of Aristotle the nature of democracy was intrinsically aristocratic as citizenship was limited to free individuals only. Therefore, the element of deliberation was there but it was exclusive in its nature (Gutman, & Thompson, 2004). Even in the early modern period, the notion of deliberation remained confined to discussions among political leaders and elected representatives of the people. The founding fathers of American democracy though aimed at establishing institutions to promote deliberation but for a long time, the participation remained limited to white men only as women and non-whites were deprived of their civil and political rights. Rousseau's notion of the general will and Mill's idea of democracy by discussion are considered to be the sources of deliberative democracy, but the real development of this idea occurred in the 20th century (Gutman, & Thompson, 2004).

There is a huge body of literature on Deliberative Democracy and different thinkers have dealt with different aspects of this notion, but Jürgen Habermas is considered to be the father of this idea. Other major thinkers who have contributed to the promotion of this idea are John Rawls, Joshua Cohen, Alf Ross, and A. D. Lindsay. Although they all deal with this notion from different perspectives one factor common among all is the promotion of collective goals and consensus building among different fractions of society through reasoned discussions (Cunningham, 2002). The idea behind promoting this culture is to lessen the elitist nature of republican democracy where people having once voted in favor of their preferred representative, don't get enough opportunities to further participate in the process of decision-making. It is obvious that common people cannot be part of legislative proceedings, nor they can get involved in bureaucratic affairs but through



constant deliberation, they can make policies of public concern as reflective of general welfare as possible. Frequent exchange of dissenting views can pave the way for a culture of empathy and greater tolerance which are the most desired outcomes of a democratic process. In the following section, I will further elaborate upon this idea by applying Giovanni Sartori's rules of concept analysis discussed in section one.

2.1- Sartorian framework and Deliberative Democracy

Sartori's thesis of concept analysis is based upon three main pillars. The first is to define the concept in the most unequivocal manner. Second, to make appropriate classification of concepts in a way that avoids unnecessary overlapping with different concepts and is capable of covering as many cases as possible. Third, the Sartorian criterion which deals with the level of abstraction of the concept is the most crucial. Sartori suggests that the abstractness of the concept must be determined by our level of analysis. If a researcher is dealing with an issue that is particular to a specific state, then the concept has to be more concrete and less abstract. The concept should also carry multiple attributes to substantiate the claims with enough empirical evidence. The level of abstraction increases and the need for concretization decreases as one climbs up the *ladder of abstraction*. At the highest level of analysis, which is the global level or system level, the concept will get more abstract and less concrete (Mair, 2008). In light of these three rules, I will now elaborate on the concept of Deliberative Democracy.

2.2- Defining Deliberative Democracy

Sartori says that research should begin with the defining of the concept before starting the quantitative or qualitative analysis of any particular case in light of the proposed concept. For instance, if research is dealing with the issue of democratization of Pakistan or in general then it must first define what democratization is and how it is different from other forms of governance. In the absence of clear evidence in favor of the concept, it can be defined with the help of counter-evidence. For instance, the concept of civil liberties can be defined with the help of an Egyptian case where people are largely deprived of them. The same applies to the concept of Deliberative Democracy. Either we can define it with the help of different attributes or in contrast with other forms of democracies.

Deliberative Democracy intends to take the process of deliberation beyond electoral activities. Bohman defines deliberative democracy as an ideal in which the legitimacy of decisions is achieved when reasons for rejections are exhausted (Bohman, 1998). Habermas describes deliberative democracy in his discourse theory as different from both liberal and republican forms of democracy. He opines that the prime purpose of democracy is to incorporate deliberative communications in the constitution instead of regulating competing interests as suggested by liberal democrats or republicans' end of achieving social solidarity by means of the constitution (Cunningham, 2002). It means that a truly democratic environment not only requires a collectively agreed constitution that reflects the shared aspirations of the masses rather it should also create a



culture of constant revisiting of shared aspirations. It should allow voices of dissent to rise to provide alternative views to the general public so they can keep assessing their previously held shared aspirations. That's why the aim of popular sovereignty is not only to bestow authorities to the executive to govern people as per agreed rules, but its aim is to constantly create and recreate the general will as per emerging realities.

Joshua Cohen explains it in terms of the legitimacy of institutions. He contends that in deliberative democracy institutions gain and retain legitimacy if they are providing the opportunity of public deliberation on their policies. He outlines five aspects of deliberative democracy which revolves around the issue of legitimacy of institutions and their policies. First, Deliberative Democracy is dynamic in nature as it is an *ongoing association*. Second, it is the constant deliberation and capacity of an institution to provide room for deliberation that gives legitimacy to the functions of any institution. Third, members of Deliberative Democracy should believe in the diversity of preferences and should not hold any preference superior to other preferences. Fourth, they should prefer institutions where the connection between their deliberation and institutional operations is clear. Fifth, they should recognize each other's deliberative capacities and should respect the rights of others to take part in any deliberation (Cohen, 1997). It means that if any regime fails to fulfill the aforementioned criterion, it loses its claim of being a deliberative democracy. Ideal deliberation, according to Cohen, is the publicizing of different alternatives about any given problem to cause a reasonable comparison of those alternatives to choose a mutually agreed alternative. This requires immense transparency on the part of the government and its subsidiary institutions to ensure the access of the public to the required data to make such deliberations.

2.3- Comparative Aspects of Deliberative Democracy

Sartori suggests that a comparison can be made between the same kind of objects or classes specified by the concept. Determination of the class is done in the very initial section of the research where the concept is defined. If the concept is defined without clearly determining the class, then it will create challenges in terms of comparison. That is the fundamental rule of comparison that the objects which are being compared must contain some commonalities or on the basis of some shared attributes must belong to a particular class of objects. Sartori further says that classification should be exclusive (not to analyze the case or object outside of the class specified by the concept) and exhaustive (the concept should be applicable to the cases or objects of the same class) (Mair, 2008). For instance, if research is dealing with the conception of liberalization of the economy then it cannot draw examples from socialist economies unless there is no model of free market available and the researcher is forced to do *negative identification*. Moreover, the concept should be defined in a way so that can deal with the liberalization of the economy anywhere in the world.

In the previous sections, it must have become clear that deliberative democracy deals with the different types of democracies only. Further classification among these democracies can be done



by applying the concept of deliberation. Once the classification is done successfully then the process of qualitative and quantitative analysis can take place. It seems quite difficult to quantify the element of deliberation but there are certain processes through which this quantification can be done. The most central process of deliberation in a democratic regime is periodic elections among representatives of different political parties. Comparative analysis of voter turnout in the elections of different countries can help us gauge the level of deliberation in different countries. If the turnout is low in any country, it is reflective of the indifference of people towards the very fundamentals of deliberation in any democracy. In this condition, one can hardly expect deliberation beyond elections which is the aim of deliberative democracy. A qualitative comparison can be made on the basis of the electoral system to identify how inclusive an electoral system is in any particular country. It is argued that the Proportional Representation (PR) system is more inclusive than the First-Past-the-Post-System (FPTP) as it increases the chances of smaller parties and minority factions of the society getting represented in the legislature. In most of the FPTP-based electoral systems, there is a hegemony of two parties, which limits the scope of deliberation (Patrick 2010).

Even among established democracies, variations exist in methods of deliberation. In some democracies, there is a practice of constant referenda or plebiscites on issues of public concern. In Switzerland, referenda is conducted on a regular basis on the issues of most important public concern. No such provision regarding referendum is there in American and Canadian Constitutions. Some European countries recently conducted a referendum on the issue of remaining the members of European Union. There is also a practice of initiative which is conducted by civil society organizations by conducting polls on mostly contentious issues (Patrick 2010). For instance, the 2nd amendment to the American Constitution gives American citizens the right to carry weapons. There is growing opposition in America to such a law because of the increase in gun-related crimes in the recent past. American Congress is divided on this issue and cannot reach any decision. In this scenario, civil society organizations have the capacity to conduct nationwide polls on this issue and they can exert pressure on the legislators to reach any decision. Advancement of technology has also widened the scope of deliberation in the shape of electronic, print, and social media.

2.4- Level of Analysis and the Issue of Abstraction

Sartori gives his idea of the *ladder of abstraction* in which he deals with three levels of analysis. low, medium, and high. These levels of analysis vary in terms of the abstractness of the concept. If the concept is universal or global in its reach, then it has to be more abstract and should contain a lesser number of attributes to identify with. He uses the terms of intension (number of attributes of a concept) and extension (range of cases) to elaborate on this. The more the intension of the concept lesser its extension (Mair, 2008). For instance, the concept of Balkanization is applicable in a limited number of cases because of its peculiar nature. Due to its peculiarity, it requires more attributes to define that concept. On the other hand, if the term territorial disintegration is invoked



then it can be used to assess any form of disintegration. The concept of deliberative democracy can be put on the high level of the ladder of abstraction because it carries only one attribute which is deliberation. There can be varied forms of deliberation in different countries but all forms and variants of deliberation can be covered in the ambit of deliberative democracy.

In order to make the concept wider-ranging, the scope and nature of its attributes should be defined eloquently. Therefore, deliberation requires some explanation here. It will be explained with reference to the purpose it serves in a democratic polity. Maeve Cook outlines five purposes of deliberation. First, it has educative power so the participants in the process of deliberation not only fulfill their civic duty but also get enriched intellectually by coming across different viewpoints. Second, it strengthens the feelings of being a community by institutionalizing the necessity of justification of laws and policies people impose upon each other. It decreases the possibility of *tyranny of the majority*. Third, it brings the element of fairness in democratic decision-making by constant questioning of procedures by means of deliberation. Fourth, it improves the quality of democratic outcomes due to constant rational assessments in the light of proposed alternative views. Fifth, it promotes the notion of democracy which is most compatible with the modern self which does not succumb to any ahistorical standards and believes in the equality of free reasoning as the most fundamental right of human beings. (Cooke, 2000) In the light of the aforementioned explanation of the purpose of deliberation any democratic regime can be assessed how deliberative it is in its nature and what measures can be taken to make it more deliberative.

3– Conclusion

Democracy as a concept and practice has immensely evolved historically yet there is much to be done to make it of universal appeal. The growing influence of the forces of capitalism in democratic processes and decision-making is making the system increasingly elitist. It has also dampened the potential of democracy in favor of such regimes where discipline is prior to freedom. Even in some non-western countries, it has been reduced to mere procedures and forms instead of substantiating it with rigorous intellectual exercise. This reductionist tendency has caused the rise of such democratic regimes which are intrinsically antithetical to democratic ideals. The growing popularity of Donald Trump among the GOP candidates and the rise of religious extremism in India after the arrival of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister are two of many such instances. Democracy, instead of providing a framework for conflict resolution, is exacerbating the already existing conflicts in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. This predicament demands to revisit some of our preconceived notions about the form of democracy.

Deliberative Democracy aims to rectify the flaws of traditional representative democracy, but it is itself not immune from shortcomings. Commentators have highlighted some factual inconsistencies of deliberative democracy as to how it overestimates the capacity of citizens of deliberation. Theorists of deliberative democracy are more interested in the process of deliberation



but not that much about the end result or the agreement. Consensus building becomes quite difficult when participants of deliberation are arguing over morally contentious issues like abortion. In this case, they will have to resort to Majoritarianism (Gutman, & Thompson, 2004). There are many such criticisms but that can be left to discuss in another paper. In this paper, I tried to establish deliberative democracy as a concept to qualitatively and quantitatively assess the credentials of democracies around the world. Thinkers and policymakers can resort to this concept to come up with a list of proscriptions and prescriptions relating to improvement in the state apparatuses to give maximum legitimacy to their operations. It must be realized that seeking legitimacy is not a time task rather it is an ongoing process because policies that earlier seemed legitimate can lose their legitimacy in the wake of new socio-economic and political realities.

The real issue is how to equip this concept in a way that can be of immense help in comparative political research. I contend that the Sartorian framework provides us with strong foundations in terms of formulating a concept to conduct substantive empirical research. It provides us such methodological tools that are helpful in both quantitative and qualitative research. Some thinkers argue that his *conceptual stretching* notion is over-cautious and results in premature abandonment of conceptual categories, but that issue can be resolved by revisiting the taxonomy of categories. (Collier & Mahon, 1993) There are some concerns raised about Sartori's conceptual traveling across the ladder of abstraction that the rise and fall of properties of the concept are not necessarily inversely proportional. This problem is dealt with by the proponents of radical categories (Collier & Mahon, 1993). The purpose of this paper is to define deliberative democracy to make it applicable as widely as possible and Sartori's guidelines serve that purpose quite fairly. It is not to claim here that Sartori's idea about concept formation is perfect, but it definitely provides an excellent starting point for empirical research and will remain an important benchmark in the concept formation debate.



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