Direct Democracy Vs Representative Democracy Essay, Research Paper

Direct Democracy vs Representative Democracy

The term Democracy is derived from two Greek words, demos, meaning

people, and kratos, meaning rule. These two words form the word democracy which

means rule by the people. Aristotle, and other ancient Greek political

philosophers, used the phrase, `the governors are to be the governed’, or as we

have come to know it, `rule and be ruled in turn’.

The two major types of democracy are Representative Democracy and Direct

Democracy. Clearly the arguments for and against each form of democracy are

plentiful. However, it is my belief that theoretically, Direct Democracy is the

superior form of political rule. Due to problems with in the direct democratic

system, its use as a practical form of government is not even thinkable.

Therefore, in order for any form of democracy to function, Representative

Democracy is the superior form of political rule.

Jean Jacques Rousseau is considered by many to be the `Grandfather’ of

direct the democracy theory. Rousseau’s ideal society would be where the

citizens were directly involved in the creation of the laws which are to govern

their lives. He maintained that, “all citizens should meet together and decide

what is best for the community and enact the appropriate laws. Any law which

was not directly created by the citizens is not valid, and if those laws are

imposed on people, that is equivalent to the people being enslaved.

The citizens of a society must both develop and obey `the supreme

decision of the general will’, which is the society’s determination of the

common good. It is not even thinkable that all citizens will agree on what good

is. Rousseau recognized this and accepted a term of majority rule. Those who

voted against a policy which is found to be the best for the general, must have

been thinking of personal gains, rather than the gains of the entire society.

The feature which distinguishes direct democracy from other forms of

government is the idea of agreement and the key to agreement is discussion. It

is impossible to reach an agreement without discussion, because it is not right

to think that everybody will have the same opinion on all matters. But, it is

very possible, that through discussion an agreement could be reached by all

members. Representation, on the other hand allows a select few to make

decisions in their own best interest, which is not necessarily the best interest

of the society.

However, direct democracy is not the perfect method to produce a union

of the community. For a direct democracy to work, face to face communication

between all members of the community is needed. The only way this is possible

is to meet in large groups. Due to the fear of high tension, many citizens

“will not participate in these large group meeting. So in order for these

fearful people to voice their opinions they must get together in smaller, less

tensions groups, where they are not as timid to say as they wish to see happen.

A direct democracy can only work in a small group, so as a form of government

for an entire community or country, direct democracy would definitely fail. As

the membership increases, people become less involved. Once the membership

reaches the size of a country, the participation still exists, but is limited to

as low as it can go. Thus in a country, any form of direct democracy is only

possible in individual communities.

In order for a committee small enough to operate on direct democracy

principles to have any authority at all, it must represent a much larger group.

Membership in this larger group is chosen by election, so the people still have

a say in the ruling process. Since the rulers are selected by the people, the

rulers should represent what the public wants. Thus, out of direct democracy, is

born a new form of government, the Representative Democracy.

Representative democracy is not democracy in its purest form. The main

argument against representative democracy is that “No one can represent me. I’m

the only one who knows what I’m thinking and no one else can represent my

views.” We have already learned it is also impossible to represent yourself.

Through representation, chosen by the people, the hope is that all people will

be adequately represented. While everyone may not get all of their views

represented all the time, representative democracy should create a situation

where most of the views are represented.

Direct democracy is not impossible in all situations, but in order for

in to exist the following two characteristics must exist- The organization must

be local, (limited in members) and the opinions of the members must be similar

to each other. While these conditions are often found in a small organization,

when looking at a country, these conditions are impossible to meet.

In a mixed society direct democracy would lead to ineffective management,

unwanted inefficiency, and political instability. While In a representative

democracy, the representatives rely on political compromise to resolve conflicts,

and develop policies that are flexible enough to meet shifting circumstances.

The once dominant Greek culture has become out-of-date and along with it

went the hope for a direct democracy system of government. The direct democracy

theory may have worked in the small Greek towns of 500BC, but in large modern

societies, it simply could not work. Which is why the representative democracy

was started, which, while providing the citizen with less opportunity for

participation, is ideally suited for rule in modern times Thus, clearly a

direct democracy is the only true form of democracy. However, if democracy is to

be is used in a modern society, it can not take its purist form.