


## POLITICAL CULTURE: THE FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRACY

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### ABSTRACT

The measurement of democracy is something increasingly carried out both by the application of indices resulting from the evaluation of experts and by the application of political culture surveys that seek to verify how the population evaluates the democracy of their country. However, these evaluations are not always coherent, especially due to the more pessimistic view of the population. In addition to the evaluation of democracy, the existence of a democratic political culture implies the stabilization of democratic rules by countries. But what does the population understand by democracy, and what is the possibility of building a democratic political culture when it does not exist in a country or region? To answer these questions, three objectives were established: to verify whether there is coherence in the evaluation of democracy among experts and the population; what the population understands as fundamental elements of democracy; and whether the teaching of history is a way of building a democratic political culture. To achieve these objectives, data from the seventh round of the World Values Survey (WVS), the V-Dem democracy index and official Brazilian documents on the national common curricular bases, especially for the teaching of history, were compiled. The central hypothesis is that there is divergence in the evaluations between experts and the population, that the majority of the population correctly understands the fundamental elements of democracy, and that the teaching of history in Brazil is one of the few opportunities for the creation of a democratic political culture from school. The data analyzed confirm the hypothesis, although more research with this intertwining should be verified: on democracy, on the teaching of history and on democratic political culture.

**Keywords:** Representative Democracy. Political Culture. Teaching of History.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are several institutions in the world that seek to measure the levels of democracy, as a political regime. Two examples are the *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) project, whose headquarters are at the V-Dem Institute of the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and the latest report on democracy in the world can be seen in Nord *et al* (2024); and the *Economist Intelligence Unit* project (2023). Both studies prioritize the experts' assessment of democracy. Despite being a technical form of measurement, democracy is a political regime that also depends on the level of support expressed by the population, despite the fact that it does not necessarily need to understand the truly important variables for democracy. Since the study by Verba and Almond (1963), the political culture of society has been a fundamental dimension for verifying the stability of democracy in the world. As Inglehart and Welzel (2009) point out, without a democratic political culture, democracy will hardly remain firm in a country, even if political institutions are functioning properly.

Political culture is, in general terms, the set of values, feelings and opinions that the population has about politics, that is, about political institutions and processes (Baquero and Prá, 2007). In the case of Brazil, several studies have demonstrated the fragility of democratic political culture since the 80s of the twentieth century (Moises, 1995, 2010; Baquero, 1999, 200; Castro and Castilho, 2021). In studies of other countries, it can be seen that support for democracy varies depending on whether the country is considered democratic or not, in the sense that countries that are younger in democracy, or authoritarian countries, do not have a population massively supporting democracy (Bilodeau, McAllister and Kanji, 2010; Bloom and Arikan, 2012; Sjifra, *et al*, 2020; Ho, 2023; Nkansah and Bartha, 2023).

Therefore, this article has three objectives. The first is to compare the evaluations that experts and the population make of representative democracy in countries on all continents. To this end, data from the *World Values Survey* (WVS), from the seventh round between 2017/2023 (Haerpfer, 2024), and from the V-Dem project (data from 2019) are used. The second is to verify the WVS data on which fundamental characteristics of democracy are pointed out by the world population. The third objective is to discuss how it will be possible to create a democratic political culture in Brazil, as this country is one of those that still does not have a majority population that supports democracy. Each objective has a hypothesis. The first hypothesis is that there is a certain correspondence between

experts and the population regarding certain countries (whether or not they are democratic), but it is not absolute, since in some countries there are divergences between the evaluations of experts and that of the population. The second hypothesis is that the world population points out mostly valid technical elements regarding fundamental characteristics, but part of the world population thinks that democracy combines with non-democratic elements, such as the government of the military and religious authorities. The third hypothesis is that the teaching of history is a good way to create democratic elements in the population. For the latter hypothesis, official documents from Brazil are used, such as the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), and academic articles on the subject.

Graph 1 shows the results of the crossing between the two variables of democracy evaluation, on the vertical axis (y) is the view of the experts measured by the representative democracy index (oscillating between 0.0 and 1.0). This index is built from Dahl's (1997) view of polyarchic democracy. More than 4,200 experts evaluated the 62 countries in Figure 1. On the horizontal axis (x) are the answers of the more than 90,000 respondents in the seventh round of the WVS to the question: how democratic is this country being governed today? Respondents answered between zero (not at all democratic) and 10 (totally democratic).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The quantitative data of this survey is based on information from 62 countries participating in the seventh round of the WVS (held between 2017 and 2023): Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ecuador, Slovakia, Ethiopia, Greece, Guatemala, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Slovakia, South Africa, South Africa, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Nigeria, New Zealand, Pakistan, Peru, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zimbabwe. They are countries from all continents of the world, with the largest part of the world's population, in addition to being from different political regimes, human development indices and economic structure. There were more than 90 thousand interviews.

Respondents answered two questions about democracy, how democratically they are governed (answering between 1 and 10), and about nine fundamental elements of democracy: (1) women have the same rights as men, (2) people choose their leaders in

free elections, (3) civil rights protect people's freedom from oppression, (4) people receive state unemployment benefits, (5) governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor, (6) the state equals people's incomes, (7) people obey their rulers, (8) the army takes over when the government is incompetent, (9) religious authorities interpret laws. These two questions got different amounts of respondents because some chose not to answer.

Data from the V-Dem representative democracy index for these countries were also extracted. The index of representative democracy is based on the eight items presented by Dahl (1997). These items point to the existence of free elections, the possibility of disputing the electorate's preference for registered political parties with the resources to do so, as well as the possibility that the main positions in the state go through elections. The index of representative democracy oscillates between 0 (zero) and 1 (one), that is, the closer to zero, the worse the democracy, while the closer to 1, the better the evaluation.

These data were analyzed with two statistical techniques. To test the first hypothesis, the scatter plot technique was used, as it implied the crossing of two variables (from the evaluations of the experts and the population). The second hypothesis was tested with descriptive statistics (frequency, mean and standard deviation). These techniques are pointed out by Field (2020) as the most appropriate for this type of analysis.

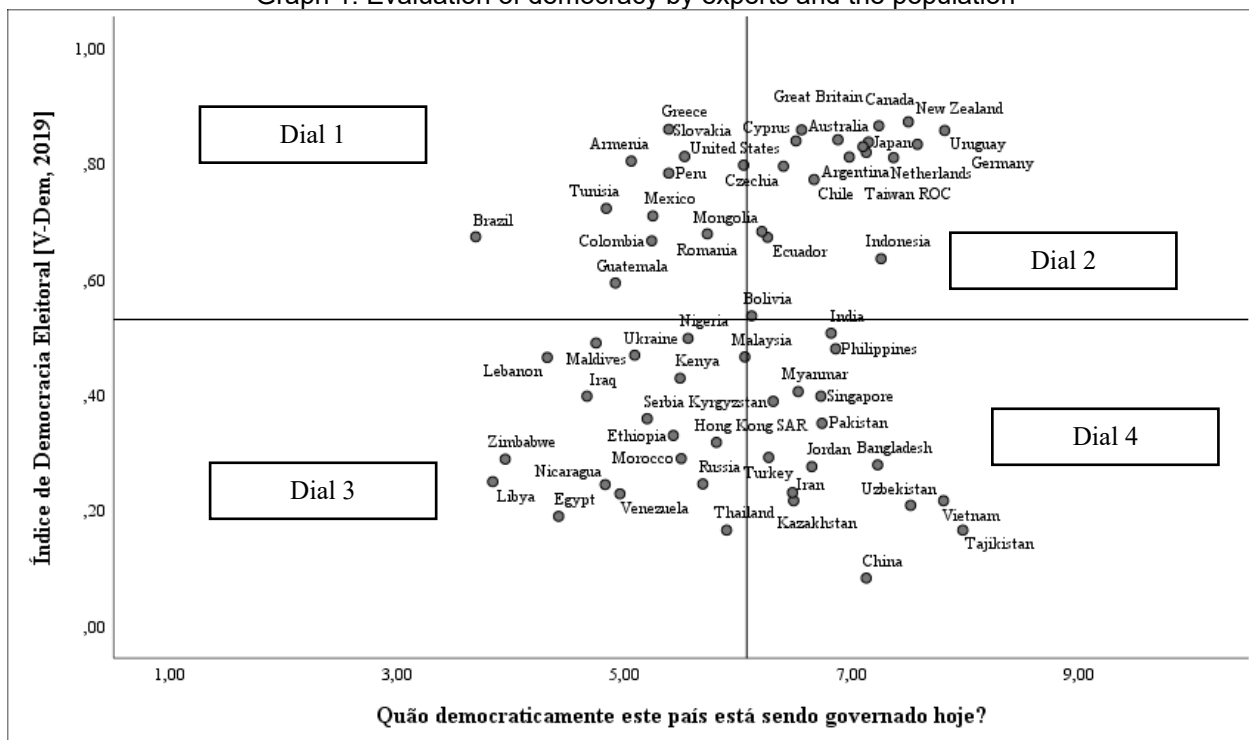
Hypothesis 3 was tested by the qualitative analysis of the documents on the BNCC, and with a search on the Capes Journal Portal, with the Boolean strategy of the terms "democracy" (and) "BNCC" (and) "history teaching". The articles found were analyzed qualitatively.

## RESULTS

Graph 1 shows the results of the crossing between the two variables of democracy evaluation, on the vertical axis (y) is the view of the experts measured by the representative democracy index (oscillating between 0.0 and 1.0). This index is built from Dahl's (1997) view of polyarchic democracy. More than 4,200 experts evaluated the 62 countries in Figure 1. On the horizontal axis (x) are the answers of the more than 90,000 respondents in the seventh round of the WVS to the question: how democratic is this country being governed today? The interviewees answered between 1 (one, not at all democratic) and 10 (ten, totally democratic). These evaluations are not standardized, so the scatter plot serves to relate two variables that are measured differently. In the case of Graph 1, the experts' variable oscillates between 0.0 and 1.0, and the population variable

oscillates between 1 (one) and 10 (ten). The results in Graph 1 are the average results of the countries.

Graph 1. Evaluation of democracy by experts and the population



Source: prepared by the authors based on data from WVS (Haerpfer *et al*, 2024) and V-Dem (Nord *et al*, 2024)

It can be seen from the results of Graph 1 that there are countries in four quadrants: quadrant 1 is one of the countries in which the experts have a more optimistic view of representative democracy than the interviewed population. Brazil stands out visually for being the country with the worst popular evaluation. In fact, the survey in Brazil was in 2018, the height of the democratic crisis that began with the impeachment of President Dilma in 2016 and the election of Bolsonaro to the Presidency of the Republic in 2018. But, for the 2019 experts, Brazil boasted a reasonable evaluation (above 0.6). The countries in quadrant 4, on the other hand, also have divergences between experts and the population. For example, China is the country in which experts are more pessimistic, while the population, but optimistic for the evaluation of democracy. The countries in quadrants 2 and 3, unlike the previous ones, are marked by coherence between the vision of experts and the population. In the case of the countries in quadrant 2, such as New Zealand, Canada and Uruguay, there is agreement between experts and the population on the levels of democracy. For quadrant 3, coherence is due to the lack of democracy.

Table 1 reveals the answers of the interviewees about the fundamental elements of democracy. The more than 90 thousand interviewees (only one question had fewer answers), answered about: "for democracy many things are desirable, but not all are considered fundamental. For each of the statements, say to what extent you think they are fundamental characteristics of democracy", answers between 1 (one) and 10 (ten, Haerpfer et al, 2024). It can be seen that the highest averages are for questions about women's rights, the choice in free elections of leaders and civil rights related to people's freedom from oppression. The worst averages are for items related to the army taking power and the laws being interpreted by religious authorities.

Table 1. Responses to the fundamental elements of democracy.

Questions	Respondents	Average	Standard deviation
Women have the same rights as men	94.798	8,01	2,607
People choose their leaders in free elections	94.384	7,96	2,587
Civil rights protect people's freedom from oppression	92.422	7,38	2,702
People receive state unemployment aid	94.190	6,85	2,874
Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor	93.842	6,34	3,040
The State makes people's incomes equal.	93.627	5,93	3,089
People obey their rulers	93.444	5,86	3,064
The army takes control when the government is incompetent	88.993	4,71	3,239
Religious authorities interpret the laws	92.305	4,12	3,051

Source: prepared by the authors based on WVS data (Haerpfer *et al*, 2024). Note: Respondents vary because of respondents who did not respond.

Regarding the teaching of history, the last change was with the National High School Policy, instituted on July 31, through Law No. 14,945/2024. Previously, the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) had already been provided for by Law No. 9,394/1996 (Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education - LDB), having been approved by the National Council of Education (CNE), in December 2017, for the stages of Early Childhood Education and Elementary Education (CNE/CP Resolution No. 2/2017), and, in December 2018, for the High School stage (CNE/CP Resolution No. 4/2018). Both were then ratified by the Minister of State for Education. This last change expanded the possibilities of discussing democracy beyond the discipline of history, as it once again included philosophy and sociology.

On the Capes Journal Portal, in a survey in November 2024, there is no article that articulates the BNCC, democracy, and the teaching of history. The teaching of history has



already been discussed as a potential for the treatment of democracy (Lucas and Ornaghi, 2024). But this discussion is still incipient in Brazil.

## DISCUSSION

The intertwining of the three objectives allows the hypotheses to also be analyzed in articulation. The first hypothesis was proven, as the data point to two types of countries with regard to the evaluations of experts and the population on the levels of democracy. There are countries in which there are divergences between the two types of evaluators: Brazil and China stand out, because the first country shows the most pessimistic evaluation of the population, while the second, the most pessimistic evaluation of the experts. In both cases, the differences end up revealing the problems of democracy in two of the most important countries in the world, that is, two countries that make up the BRICS, the acronym BRICS is derived from the initials of these countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. However, part of the countries evaluated presented consistent results among experts and the population, as part of hypothesis 1. At the extremes, Libya stands out, as a bad result, and New Zealand, as a good result.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed, since the fundamental items that received the highest averages of the interviewees in the world are elements that are actually present in the specialized literature on democracy: civil rights, gender equality and free elections, as in the dimensions of democracy for the V-Dem experts (Nord, *et al*, 2024). Of course, even low to average, it is undeniable that citizens of the world understand that democracy can combine with the army in place of the civil authorities and the religious interpreting laws. As much as the highest averages have really been for democratic items, part of the world's population understands that democracy can contain authoritarian characteristics.

On the other hand, the laws on education in Brazil point to few disciplines dealing directly with democracy. In addition to the history subject, only two others in high school can deal with this topic, although the regulation of these contents has not yet been carried out in 2024. In any case, it is the teaching of history that carries the challenge of discussing the relevant social aspects of democracy. In part, the study of dictatorships in Brazil can reveal the evils of autocracy. However, the treatment of the history of the present time on political regimes stands out with special importance, even more so with all the databases available

to be worked on in classroom and research activities, such as those of the WVS and V-Dem.

The teaching of history has already been identified as "an important educational instrument for training the exercise of democracy" (Bittencourt, 2018, p. 127). Even more so with a problem in democracy since the anti-democratic episodes related to the removal of President Dilma (Mattos, Bessone and Mamigonian, 2016). In this sense, historians and the teaching of history are at the forefront of political education in Brazil, especially in the importance of the school for this formation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The limitations of the article are based on the use of a single research on the fundamental elements of democracy. It is necessary that, in addition to supporting democracy, the fundamental elements that the population understands as democratic must also be investigated. Research on democracy and the teaching of history also needs to increase the scope, especially due to the fragility of democracy in terms of political culture in Brazil. International data also reveal that democracy has problems in other countries. But Brazil is a special case, as it is marked by the European Eurocentric formation.

The teaching of history is a fundamental basis for the construction of a democratic political culture, as well as education in general, from basic education to graduate school. However, the existence of anti-democratic episodes in Brazil reveals that the population is not prepared for the necessary resistance of democratic procedures (Mattos, Bessone and Mamigonian, 2016).

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