

BRAZIL'S POLITICAL SELF-PORTRAIT

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ABSTRACT: Political values are currently considered as an abstract part of ethics. But given cultures adapt them, in real life, to their specific set of values. The purpose of this paper is to provide basis for analyzing how present Brazilian culture shapes some democratic issues related to the political system, citizenship, rights and duties, and how strongly it seems to be attached to the democratic political system. Some considerations are added in order to show how Brazilian perceive their own collective personality.

1. NEW DEMOCRACIES

Countries that restarted their democratic activity after long years of authoritarianism could verify that getting back the right of suffrage is not enough. The hard years of silence showed that political democracy is the unavoidable basis for social progress but it should be established in a climate of social welfare. The quest for participation in decisions affecting society grows all over the world. Representation, as a fundament for democracy, is losing reputation because people does not feel that elected leaders are ruling towards the general well being.. On the other hand, there are not basis for an effective social participation.

Getulio Vargas Foundation -a well known and authoritative Brazilian institution- run a research in order to verify the popular perception about republican political institutions. The work was jointly sponsored by the *Instituto de Estudos sobre a Religião -ISER* (Institute for Religion Studies), Ford Foundation and the Bank of Brazil.

Results confirm the disbelief on some institutions -specially the political ones- but show a growing conviction on the power of the community for solving its own problems.

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2. RIGHTS

The survey tried to assess Brazilian people's perception on rights and duties. Rights were classified as **civil** (freedom, equality, justice, physical preservation, life, property, security), **social** (health, education, employment, housing, social security, retirement, labor statutes) and **political** (related to political institutions and parties).

Result was, at the same time, shocking and surprising: the majority of the population (56.7 per cent) is not aware about their rights. Thereof, young people are the most aware of them (47.5 per cent). Nevertheless, people aware of their rights quote social rights more frequently (28.6 per cent).

3. DUTIES

Social duties were classified as **civil** (tax payment, law observance, another's rights respect), **moral** and **religious** (familiar duties, integrity, to be a hard-working person, help the others), **civic** (patriotism, consideration to the national banner and the national anthem) and **political** (citizen and electoral participation, struggle for rights). The result was disappointing: 55.7 per cent of people does not know which are their duties. Among the group that could quote them, civil rights are the most well known. Notwithstanding, 54.6 per cent consider that tax evading should never be accepted and 41.1 per cent think that sometimes this behavior is tolerable.

Courts are seen as slow (54.1 per cent), but Labor Courts are well considered (28.8 per cent). People believe, however, that in relation with the same crime, judges will try more severely poor than rich people (95.7 per cent), blacks than whites (66.4 per cent), men than women (44 per cent). Labor courts will try better owners than employees (43.9 per cent). Civic, social and an political participation is weak. Unions are the organizations that have more members but they are only 13.6 per cent of workers as a whole; there are, however, about 15.8 per cent that would like to become a member. Neighbors' organizations have only 5.5% of possible members; 25.7 per cent would like to apply for membership. Political parties are not doing well: only 2.1 per cent are members and just 8.9 would like to be. Numbers show a very low participation but a repressed willingness of engaging in social and political activities.

68.4 per cent does not like political parties but 80 per cent voted in the last ballots (vote in Brazil is compulsory). If a law is considered wrong, people votes a candidate that defends the desired rule (27 per cent), or subscribes petitions and joins parades (20.6 per cent), or goes to the courts (17 per cent), or look for unions or other association's support (19.9 per cent). In 1997, 16.7 per cent subscribed petitions, 6.6 per cent worked in the Campaign against the Hungry (*Campanha contra a Fome*), 5.8 per cent joined strikes or stops or attended protest walks (4.1 per cent).

4. SELF-PORTRAIT

How Brazilian consider themselves? First assessment is that pride of being Brazilian is strong: 77 per cent. Which are the reasons for being so pleased?. In first place: "nature" (19.8 per cent) that includes landscape beauties, women, natural richness and fertility, and weather. In second place are the country characteristics (9.3 per cent), specially the absence of wars or conflicts, freedom, democracy, progress, the economic plan (!). And, in third place, "people's character" (8.8 per cent) that is perceived as joyful, festive, hospitable, affable, religious. Sports, Carnival, music and the arts follow with 5.2 per cent.

It was asked if there were reasons for getting shame of being Brazilian. Responses were poverty and unemployment (17.4%), violence (14 per cent), politics and politicians (11.6 per cent), the present state of public education and health (5.7 per cent) and corruption (5 per cent).

5. BAD AND GOOD CHARACTERISTICS

Which are the aspects that better define Brazilians? Accordingly their perception, Brazilian is frugal (74.1 per cent), hard-working (69.4 per cent), resigned (61.4 per cent), fighter (48 per cent), solidary (46.1 per cent), adamant (42.3 per cent), pacific (40.4 per cent) and honest (36.2 per cent). Some interviewed people pointed negative characteristics: not trustable (30.8 per cent), violent (28.5 per cent), lazy (24 per cent), selfish (21.6 per cent), and not honest (17.2 per cent).

The research conclusions made stronger the impression that citizenship's building -unavoidable issue for the maturity of democracy- is a long way just initiated. People does not trust the individuals that supposedly should accomplish that mission -especially politicians and judges-.

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