

TEMERLOH PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL (TPCC) AS A MODEL OF PARTICIPATORY/DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This paper is an attempt to analyse a shift in decision-making approach for Malaysia's public policy formulation. Since the 12th general election, people participation in decision-making process is becoming very important in order for the government to produce a people friendly public policy. Therefore, this paper takes the opportunity to study a model of participatory or deliberative democracy which has been introduced through the Temerloh Parliamentary Consultative Council (TPCC) by Deputy Minister of Ministry of Higher Education, Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah. Model that has been introduced by Dato' Saifuddin is one of its kinds, which has never been practiced before or in the government's agenda for effective governance. Researchers are in the intention to analyse the effectiveness and the TPCC model can be the best model of public deliberation in Malaysia and can be copied by other constituency as well.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, Malaysia, TPCC, Temerloh, Saifuddin Abdullah

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks on the effectiveness of Temerloh Parliamentary Consultative Council (TPCC) to be the model of public deliberation. Finding from this paper will determine the reason on why participatory/deliberative democracy is important for Malaysia and can be the model for future multiracial/multicultural Malaysia. Objectives of this paper are as follow. First is to explain the relation between the model with the maturity of Malaysia democracy in general. Second is to analyse whether this model is good for the people and reliable and effective for policy formulation and implementation in Temerloh especially from the perspective of the National Key Results Area (NKRA) and the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) set up by the Federal Government. Third is to access the roles played by the civil society, business community and people generally and how they react and contribute to the implementation of this model in Temerloh. And fourth is to make recommendations based on the effectiveness of this model implemented in Temerloh and whether it can be exported to other parliamentary constituencies in Malaysia.

THEORY OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

According to Yusef Waghid, this notion of democracy accentuates three inter-related aspects central to an understanding of democracy: democracy as a system, democracy as a sphere for debate, and democracy as a set of meanings.¹ The first two depictions can be linked to two broad conceptions of democracy. First, democracy as a representative system of political decision-making and, second, democracy as a sphere for social and political life in which people enjoy equal opportunities and are engaged in self-development, self-fulfilment and self-determination.² In this regard, a representative democracy maximises citizens' opportunities for self-determination, hence 'they must live in association with others...(which) necessarily requires that they must sometimes obey collective decisions that are binding on all members of the association'.³

According to P. Levine, democracy requires deliberation for three reasons:

1. To enable citizens to discuss public issues and form opinions;
2. To give democratic leaders much better insight into public issues than elections are able to do;
3. To enable people to justify their views so we can sort out the better from the worse.⁴

Deliberative democracy simply refers to a conception of democratic government that secures a central place for reasoned discussion (rational deliberation) in political life. For Amy Gutman and Dennis Thompson, a deliberative democratic theory offers 'a conception of democracy that secures a central place for moral discussion in political life'.⁵ They argue that the promise of a deliberative democratic theory lies in a concern for 'finding terms of cooperation that each citizen can accept' for the reason that contemporary societies are driven by deep conflict and moral disagreement.⁶ James Bohman, another defender of deliberative democracy, posits that democracy in some form implies public deliberation; that is, 'the deliberation of citizens is necessary if decisions are not to be merely imposed upon them...consent, is after all, the mean feature of democracy'.⁷ In other words, political decision-making is legitimate insofar as policies are produced in 'a process of public

¹ Waghid, Y. (2002) Communitarian Deliberative Democracy and its Implications for Political Discourse in South Africa. *Politikon* 29(2): 183-207.

² Carr, W. and A. Hartnett (1996) *Education and the Struggle for Democracy: The Politics of Educational Ideas*. Buckingham: Open University Press. 40.

³ Dahl, R. (2000) A Democratic Paradox. *Political Science Quarterly* 115(1): 38.

⁴ Levine, P. (2003) *The New Progressive Era: Toward a Fair and Deliberative Democracy*. USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

⁵ Gutman, A. and D. Thompson (1990) Moral Conflict and Political Consensus. *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political and Legal Philosophy* 101(1): 1.

⁶ *Ibid.* 26.

⁷ Bohman, J. (1996) *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity and Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 4.

discussion and debate in which citizens and their representatives, going beyond mere self-interest and limited points of view, reflect on the general interest or on their common good’.

Among the numbers of definitions of deliberation and deliberative democracy, the Deliberative Democracy Consortium has one of the most practical versions: Deliberation is an approach to decision-making in which citizens consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions and understandings. Deliberative democracy strengthens citizen voices in governance by including people of all races, classes, ages and geographies in deliberations that directly affect public decisions. As a result, citizens influence – and can see the result of their influence on – the policy and resource decisions that impact their daily lives and their future.⁸

However, the model of deliberative democracy must be differentiated with the other model of democracy called aggregative democracy. Colin Farrelly argues that the aggregative model of democracy is the popular show of hands understanding of democracy that we often invoke when trying to resolve disagreements.⁹ According to this model of democracy, decision-making processes ought simply to aggregate the preferences of citizens in choosing public officials and parties. The outcome of the process just mirrors the preferences of the majority of people. Iris Marion Young describes how the aggregative model conceives of democratic processes of policy formation:

Individuals in the polity have varying preferences about what they want government institutions to do. They know that other individuals also have preferences, which may or may not match their own. Democracy is a competitive process in which political parties and candidates offer their platforms and attempt to satisfy the largest number of people’s preferences. Citizens with similar preferences often organise interest groups in order to try to influence the actions of parties and policy-makers once they are elected. Individuals, interest groups, and public officials each may behave strategically, adjusting the orientation of their pressure tactics or coalition-building according to their perceptions of the activities of competing preferences.¹⁰

The aggregative model of democracy is problematic for many reasons. It fails to give sufficient attention to the emphasis on effective participation and enlightened understanding, two criteria which deliberative democrats believe are vital for achieving a more just polity. According to the aggregative model of democracy citizens participate in the decision-making process primarily by making their preferences known through voting. Deliberative democrats

⁸ Deliberative Democracy Consortium. (2003) *Deliberative Democracy*. Maryland: Research and Practitioner Conference.

⁹ Farrelly, C. (ed.) (2004) *Deliberative Democracy. An Introduction to Contemporary Political Theory*. London: Sage Publications. 137-156.

¹⁰ Young, I.R. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 19.

reject this narrow conception of participation that conceives voting as the primary political act. Deliberative democrats argue that to fully participate in the decision-making process, one must participate in authentic deliberation and not simply express one's preferences. Such deliberation requires that parties abandon the strategic behaviour characteristic of the aggregative model of democracy and strive instead to reach a consensus among free and equal participates. To participate in this discursive practice is very different from participating in the decision-making process of the aggregative model of democracy. Deliberative democrats characterise participation in the democratic process as a transformative process. Through the process of public discussion with a plurality of differently opinions, people often gain new information, learn of different experiences of their collective problems, or find that their own initial opinions are founded on prejudice or ignorance, or that they have misunderstood the relation of their own interests to others.¹¹

The more expansive conception of democratic participation that deliberative democrats endorse thus ties in well with the criterion of gaining enlightened understanding. A process of aggregating existing preferences precludes enlightened understanding as there is no attempt to understand, let alone accommodate, the concerns of one's fellow citizens. However, deliberative democrats believe that their vision of democracy fosters enlightened understanding among citizens because it embodies the principle of reciprocity.¹² Elaborating on the principle, Gutmann and Thompson argue that reciprocity entails mutual respect. Mutual respect is a form of agreeing to disagree. It consists in an excellence of character that permits a democracy to flourish in the face of fundamental moral disagreement. This is a distinctively deliberative kind of character. It is the character of individuals who are morally committed, self-reflective about their commitments, discerning of the difference between respectable and merely tolerable differences of opinion, and open to the possibility of changing their minds or modifying their positions at some time in the future if they confront unanswerable objections to their present point of view.¹³ By engaging in deliberation with those we disagree with we are expressing a willingness to listen to others, to take their concerns seriously and to find some common ground so that a just compromise can be achieved. Gutmann and Thompson consider a number of contentious policy issues, ranging from abortion and trade policy to welfare policy, to illustrate how the deliberative process fosters enlightened understanding and moral accommodation. However, mutual respect does not mean that we must always accept the claims of those we disagree with, but it does require that we listen to their concerns and that we justify our decisions by appealing to reasons we genuinely believe all reasonable persons could accept.

TEMERLOH PARLIAMENTARY CONSULTATION COUNCIL (TPCC)

Majlis Perundangan Parlimen Temerloh or Temerloh Parliamentary Consultation Council (TPCC) is a medium and a body of consultation between the representatives of Temerloh

¹¹ *Ibid.* 26.

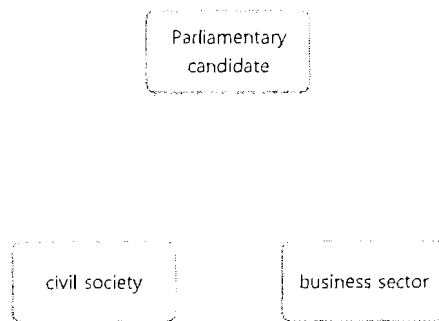
¹² Gutmann, A. and Thompson, D. (1996). *Democracy and Disagreement*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.

¹³ *Ibid.* 79-80.

parliamentary constituency and selected non-governmental organisations (NGO) or groups of local citizens in Temerloh. The constituent representatives are consisted of the member of parliamentary for Temerloh, Dato’ Saifuddin Abdullah who won the general elections in 2008. Meanwhile, the representatives from the people mostly come from two groups, the business sectors and the NGOs. The representatives accompanying the MP are the state assemblymen from the ruling party Barisan Nasional (BN), officers from various district institutions such as the District Office, the Health Department, Police Department, Education Department, and Welfare Department. The local business community represented by several association representing the business interests in the Temerloh town. NGOs are from organisations representing the youth, sport, consumers etc. In order to involve every level of society in the consultation, a few numbers of local leaders such as the Head of Village and the members of village committee were invited as well. These people act as the direct source of information and demand from the grassroots.

The council acts as a direct communication or debate in terms of policies, information and demands engaging all sorts of interests. Categorising the previous three elements of the council as state elite, sub-elite and the mass, the two-way communication line involves these three groups with the district office-bearers and the local representatives. The mass received information and reports in the form of directive orders and the updated reports on projects implemented by the constituency. The district officers received information, suggestions, feedbacks and complaints from the local people. Communication line between the MP and district officers with the people is also exclusive. Sometimes the business communities and NGOs acted as mediators between the local officers and the masses. Figure below shows the communication line among the people involved in the TPCC.

Figure 1: Communication Line in TPCC



Since its establishment on 10th May 2008, TPCC has held its meeting twice every year. The success of TPCC was determined by the seriousness of the MP for Temerloh constituency Dato’ Saifuddin who also the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, to show to Malaysian that participatory democracy or deliberative democracy can work in Temerloh if properly practised. Among the agendas of the meetings besides singing the national anthem Negaraku and prayer recital, the mission and agenda of TPCC were to make it as a body to formulate policy for the constituency, discuss the local problems and how to resolve them,

check and balance the MP and local government officers in ensuring them to be transparent and accountable to the people, and a medium for people to engage their leaders in order for their grievances and concerns be expressed by their MP and state assemblymen to the highest authority in the country.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF TEMERLOH

Temerloh is a town in Central Pahang, Malaysia in Temerloh district. Located about 130 kilometres (81 miles) from Kuala Lumpur along the Kuantan-Kuala Lumpur trunk road, Temerloh is the second largest town in Pahang after Kuantan. It is situated at the junction of the Pahang River and the Semantan River. The district consists of two areas, the 1,442-square-kilometre (557 sq mi) Municipal Council Area (64.08%) and the 808-square-kilometre (312 sq mi) outer Municipal Council Area (35.92%). Today, Temerloh usually refers to the territory under the administration of Temerloh Municipal Council or *Majlis Perbandaran Temerloh*, which includes the smaller towns adjacent to the city such as Mentakab, Lanchang, Kuala Krau and Kerdau. Temerloh district is bordered by Maran district on the east, Bentong on the west, Jerantut and Bera on the north and south, respectively. An old town with some colonial buildings and shop houses, the town has prospered in recent years as a transportation hub and new industrial centre. There have been many new commercial and industrial hub built in Temerloh in recent years. Cutting travel time in half, the newly completed East Coast Expressway links the town to Kuala Lumpur and Kuantan and adds to the growth of Temerloh.

Temerloh has been rebranded as '*Bandar IkanPatin*', which literally means 'Patin Fish Town'. Patin (Pangasius sp.), a type of freshwater catfish is a local delicacy highly sought after in the country. Patin fish is famous for its juicy taste and can be considered one of the best freshwater fish in Malaysia. The Temerloh district, was established on July 1, 1889, when J. P. Rodger, the first Pahang Resident divided Pahang state into six smaller administration areas (districts): Pekan, Rompin, Kuala Pahang, Kuantan, Temerloh and Hulu Pahang. The capital of Temerloh district then (1 July 1889) was Kuala Semantan. As Kuala Semantan begin to develop rapidly, the name Kuala Semantan was thought unsuitable as the *kuala* only refers to the river confluence. Hence, Kuala Semantan changed its name to Temerloh. Before the British colonisation, Temerloh was governed by several headvillagers (Village level) and *Orang Besar* (dignitaries) under the Pahang's administration of the 'Orang Besar System'. The Temerloh's people (then) were mainly Malay and Orang Asli (the indigenous), however there were also small groups of Chinese and Arabs there.

Table 1- List of Temerloh district representatives in the Federal Parliament (Dewan Rakyat)

Parliament	Seat name	Member of parliament	Party
P87	Kuala Krau	Ismail Mohd Said	BN
P88	Temerloh	Saifuddin Abdullah	BN

