**REPRESENTATION, ELECTIONS AND VOTING**

*‘If voting changed anything they’d abolish it.’*

Anarchist slogan

**Elections:**

Elections are seen as nothing less than democracy in practice.

They are a means through which the people can control their government, ultimately by ‘kicking the rascals out’.

**What is representation?**

* Representation is a relationship through which an individual or a group stands for or acts on behalf, of a larger body of people
* Representation differs from democracy in that, while the former acknowledges a distinction between government and the governed, the latter, aspires to abolish this distinction and establish popular self-government.
* Representative democracy is an indirect form of democratic rule, only if the representation links government and the governed to secure people’s interests

**Theories of representation**

* **TRUSTEESHIP:**
	+ A trustee is a person who acts on behalf of others, using his/her superior knowledge, better education or experience (role of education)
* Trustee representation thus portrays professional politicians as representatives insofar as they are members of an educated elite. It is based on the belief that knowledge and understanding are unequally distributed in society, in the sense that not all citizens know what is best for them.
	+ It is associated with Edmund Burke (UK political theorist). For Burke representation is a moral duty: those with the good fortune to possess education should act in the interest of those who are less fortunate
	+ Once elected, representatives exercise independent judgement on the grounds that most people do not know their own best interests
* **DELEGATE**:
	+ A delegate is person who conveys the views of others, while having little or no capacity to exercise their own independent judgement (sale representatives, ambassadors, trade union officials)
* Initiative: a type of referendum through which the public is able to raise legislative proposals.
* Recall: a process whereby the electorate can call unsatisfactory public officials to account and ultimately remove them.
* The virtue of what has been called ‘delegated representation’ is that it provides broader opportunities for popular participation and serves to check the self-serving inclinations of professional politicians
	+ Its disadvantages (Burke): members of legislature would act as ambassadors who take instructions from their constituents (voters), rather than as representatives of the nation.
	+ Another drawback is that delegations limits the scope for leadership and statesmanship.
* **Mandate:**
* Both the trustee model and delegate model were developed before the emergence of modern political parties, and therefore view representatives as essentially independent actors.
	+ Based on the idea that,in winning an election, a party gains authority to implement the policies it outlined during the election campaign
	+ Politicians serve their voters not by thinking for themselves or acting as channel to convey their views, but by remaining loyal to their party and its policies.
* **RESEMBLANCE**:
	+ Advocates the idea that a representative government should constitute a **microcosm** of larger society, i.e. it should contain members from all groups and sections in society (social class, gender, age...)
	+ Microcosm: Literally, a little world; a miniature version of a larger body, but exact in its features and proportions.
	+ Endorsed by socialists, feminists, and other radical thinkers
	+ Suggests that only people who come from a particular group, and have shared the experiences of that group, can fully identify with its interests.-
		- Ex: A pro-feminist male may not fully sympathize with women's issue and support gender equality the same as a women.
		- Disadvantage: it is not true that a black person can represent other black people.

**Functions of elections**

* An intrinsic part of the democratic process is competitive elections
* Elections are widely used to fill public offices whose holders have policy-making responsibilities; there are some exclusions i.e. the monarchs
* The secret ballot method to elections are usually seen as the only way to guarantee a fair election
* Liberal-democratic electoral systems are characterized by universal suffrage, the secret ballot and electoral competition
* Elections are mechanism to introduce policies that reflect public opinion
	+ Bottom-up functions of election: political recruitment, making government, influencing policy and so on
	+ Top-bottom functions: building legitimacy, shaping public opinion and strengthening elites. This is the radical view of elections, portrayed as a means through which governments and political elites exercise control over their population making them flexible and governable
* So, elections are “two-way street” that provides the government and the people, the elite and the masses, with the opportunity to influence one another
* **Recruitment of politicians:** In democratic state, elections are the principal source of political recruitment. Politicians tend to possess talents and skills and good looks, not necessarily those who carry out constituency duties, serve on committees, or run government departments(specialist knowledge or experience)
* **Making governments:** Elections make governments directly only in states such as USA, France, and Venezuela in which the political executive is directly elected. In parliamentary systems, elections influence the formation of governments (majority)
* **Providing representation:** Elections are a means through which demands are channelled from public to the government. There are fair and competitive elections with little to no use of recall and initiative.
* **Influencing policy:** Elections certainly prevent governments from pursuing radical and deeply unpopular policies (exceptional cases, such as when a single issue dominates the election campaign: economy)
* **Educating voters:** election campaigns provide voters with information about parties, candidates, policies, and the political system. This leads to education only if the information provided engages public interest and stimulates debate.
* **Building legitimacy:** Elections foster legitimacy by providing justification for a system of rule. By encouraging citizens to participate in politics, even in the limited form of voting, elections mobilize active consent.
* **Strengthening elites:** Elections can be a means to manipulate and control masses.

**Types of electoral systems**

Electoral system: set of rules that governs the conduct of elections (vary greatly in different states)

* Voter can either choose between candidates or between parties
* Voter can elect a single candidate or rank the candidates running
* Electorate grouped into units or constituencies (constituencies are like components)
* Constituencies may return a single member or number of members
* Can win either from plurality (over 50% of voters) or an ‘absolute’ majority (\_\_\_\_% of population wanted them)
* Plurality= the largest number out of a collection of numbers, not necessarily an absolute majority
* Two categories on how the electoral system converts votes into seats:
* Majoritarian systems- larger parties typically win a higher proportion of seats than the proportion of votes they gain in an election

Larger parties typically win a higher proportion of seats than the proportion of votes they gain in the election.

This increases the chances of a single party gaining a parliamentary majority and being able to govern on its own.

E.g., in the UK, single party government is very firmly established despite the fact that no party has achieved an electoral majority since 1935.

* Proportional systems- guarantee an equal relationship between the seats won and the votes earned in the election (single party majority rule less likely)

Guarantee an equal or at least more equal, relationship between the seats won by a party and the votes gained in the election.

Proportional representation: the principle of PR is the principle that parties should be represented in an assembly or parliament indirect proportion to their overall electoral strength, their percentage of seats equalling their percentage of votes.

* The electoral reform debate is at heart a debate about the desirable nature of government and the principles that underpin
* ‘good’ government
* Single-member plurality system
* Second ballot system
* Alternative/supplementary vote
* Mixed-member proportional system
* Single-transferable-vote system
* Party-list system

**What do elections mean?**

* Any attempt to invest elections with meaning is fraught with danger. The people may have spoken but it is difficult to know what they have said. The meaning of elections is closely linked to the factors that shape voting behaviour.
* Individuals do not act selflessly in accordance with a general or collective will.
* Voting is shaped by a number of factors (conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational) and political theorists have not developed a universally accepted theory of voting.
* No elective mechanism may reliably give expression to the multifarious preferences of voters
* Elections provide the public with its clearest formal opportunity to influence the political process and determine who will hold power
* Elections are a visible manifestation of the public interest (can see shifts in popular moods)

Difficulties arise because the public interest can be understood as ‘interests of the public as a collective whole’ OR ‘the selfish interests of each individual person’

* Difficult to interpret voting results because it is impossible to know why voters vote as they do
* Economic theory of democracy suggests that the act of voting reflects and expression of self-interest on the part of the voters

The winning party can thus claim that its policies most closely correspond to the interests of the majority

* Election results may be skewed by images in the mass media, misinformation and propaganda
* Perhaps the most significant function of elections is to set limits to arbitrary gov’t by ensuring politicians who claim to speak
* for the public are ultimately judged by the public

**Voting behavior:**

Short term and long term influences:

•The state of the economy which reflects that there is usually a link between a government’s popularity and economic variables such as unemployment, inflation and disposable income.

• The personality and public standing of party leaders because media exposure portrays leaders as the brand image of their party.

•The mass media may also be of long term significance if biased or partisan coverage reflects structural, and therefore continuing, factors such as press ownership

**Theories of voting**

* Party identification model: voters are seen as people who identify with a party. Voting is therefore an expression of partisanship.
* The earliest theory of voting behaviour is based on the sense of psychological attachment that people have to parties.
* This model places heavy stress on early political socialisation, seeing the family as the principal means through which political loyalties are forged.
* Attitudes towards policies and leaders, and perceptions about group and personal interests, tend to be developed on the basis of party identification.
* One of the weakness is the growing evidence from a number of countries of partisan de-alignment. This indicates a general fall in party identification and a decline in habitual voting patterns.
* Sociological model: links voting behaviour to group membership. Electors’ voting behaviour reflects the economic and social position of the group to which they belong.
* This model links voting behaviour to group membership, suggesting that electors tend to adopt a voting pattern that reflects the economic and social position of the group to which they belong.
* This model highlights the importance of a social alignment, reflecting the various divisions and tensions within society. The most significant of these divisions are class, gender, ethnicity, religion and region.
* This model has been attacked on the grounds that, in focusing on social groups, it ignores the individual and the role of personal self-interest.
* Evidence of class de -alignment can be found in most western societies. E.g., absolute class voting fell from 66% (1966) to 47% (1983) in the UK; UK Labour party received more votes from non - manual workers than from manual workers.

Rational-choice model: shifts attention onto the individual rather than the group. Voters decide their party preference on the basis of personal self-interest.

* Voting is seen as a rational act, in the sense that individual electors are believed to decide their party preference on the basis of personal self-interest.
* The weakness of rational choice theories is that they abstract the individual voter from his or her social and cultural context.
* Dominant-ideology model: highlights the degree to which individual choices are shaped by a process of ideological manipulation and control. It suggests that the media are able to distort the flow of political communications by setting the agenda for debate and structuring preferences and sympathies.
* How groups and individuals interpret their position depends on how it has been presented to them through education, by the government, and above all, by the mass media.
* The weakness of the dominant ideology model is that, by overstating the process of social conditioning, it takes individual calculation and personal autonomy out of the picture altogether.