

ELECTION AND ITS TYPOLOGIES

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Abstract

Elections are the essence for strengthening the modern representative democracy. It represents the popular will and creates an interconnected relation between the public and government. It is an effective instrument for transferring power from one government to another peacefully. Periodical elections lead to install a stable democracy in a country. There are many forms and manifestations of elections. Each form is applicable in a particular political set up or country. In order to comprehend full idea about elections, it is necessary to know about its nature, origin and its typologies. The present paper is one such attempt in this connection.

Key Words

Elections, general elections, primary elections, run-off elections, alternative vote, special elections, referendum, recall elections, initiative, direct and indirect elections and local elections.

Elections

The word election has been derived from a Latin verb 'eligere' which means to pick out or to choose. Generally, it is the act of choosing someone to fill an office or position by votes.¹ It is the recognized procedure by which the preferences of the people in a society are collected regarding public decisions or actions. Politically, it refers to that formal process in which eligible voters cast votes for choosing the members of a legislative body or political executive of the state. In other words, it is a mechanism by which public representatives are elected.² It is equally applied both in private and public organizations. If the elector is one or two or the candidate is one, then the process is better to be known as appointment than election. It is through elections that modern representative democracy is being practiced in the world. The core objective of election is to take into account the opinions of all the electors to increase the representative character of the electoral decision regarding the elected body.³ Secondly, its aim is to elect a suitable person to fill a public office. It also provides an opportunity to the politicians to examine and analyze various policies

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in terms of the preferences of the public. The conduction of periodical elections also creates political awareness among the people and leads to the establishment of civilized political culture and behaviour in the society.⁴

Elections were held in the Greek city-states in the 5th and 6th centuries BC. Most of the public offices having representative nature were filled by the process of sortition or allotment in which public office holders were chosen by lot. In other words selection of the public office holders was made by lottery method. It was the principle characteristics of the Athenian democracy⁵ that everyone was equal before law and everyone had equal political and civil rights. It was under this principle that everyone was entitled for holding the public office irrespective of any social prejudice. The Greek theorists thought that the random selection of a candidate from a large number of candidates integrate the society because everyone is equally provided the chance of being selecting for a public office.⁶ In addition, these public offices were in regular rotation. On the other hand, there were few of the offices which required special skills were filled by the process of election. For instance, the Greeks military department where the generals were elected by elections. These offices were for short period and the office holders were ineligible for re-election. Voting was in the form of raising hands in a public assembly or by casting pebbles.⁷ The Greek theorists considered election as an oligarchic institution because the contesting candidates were few and it was not equally applied to all the citizens of the state. The institution of election for political offices was more established in Roman Republic than in Greece.⁸

In the medieval era, the popes and bishops of the church were chosen by an electorate consisting of those next to them in grade. Under feudalism, the powers of feudal king were limited up to some extent by law and custom and the consent of his vassals. The body of consultation was slowly and gradually expanded and transformed from one shape to another. In the beginning, the consultation of the feudal king was confined to feudal councils and latter on small assemblies that represented various sections of the society were also included in this consultative body. These assemblies provided base for the parliamentary form of government in Europe.⁹ During the 17th and 18th centuries, the principles of consultation or the consent of the governed, franchise and representation started flourishing and expanding. Until the twentieth century, the franchise or right to vote was confined to men only holding property. However the spread of democratization eased the conditions of franchise. The British reforms acts of 1832, 1867, 1884, and 1918 introduced major reforms in the franchise. These acts included middle class and working class men in the electorate. The act of 1928 granted the right of vote to women in Britain. Similarly, in America, the 15th amendment of 1870 entitled the black men for vote. The 19th amendment of 1920 in US constitution entitled the women for vote.¹⁰ The right to vote was given to women in Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. The Electoral reforms introduced in France until 1945 also enabled women for the right of vote. After

the Second World War, most of the democracies became independent and provided for universal adult franchise.¹¹

Electorate

It refers to that segment of the population which is eligible to cast vote in election. The eligibility of the voter is based on certain requirements such as citizenship, age, sound mindedness, lack of criminal record etc. Historically, the qualification of the electorate has been varied from time to time. Many criteria had been applied for the qualification of electorate. These included property, religion, citizenship, sex, race, age, residence, class, and education. With the expansion in democratic values the electorate was also expanded by easing qualification for it.¹²

Typologies of Elections

1) General Elections

They are held simultaneously throughout the country for the election of the members of the legislature at national level. They are held after a specific period of time depending upon the law of the land. In such elections various political parties render election campaigns and place parties manifestoes to the public for securing heavy mandate in elections. The party with majority gains the rein of the government in its hands. If no political party is in clear majority, then a coalition government is formed by a number of parties. General elections may be presidential or parliamentary.¹³

2) Primary Elections

Primary elections are usually held in USA. In primary elections, the registered members of a political party cast votes so that to select candidates for participating in next general elections. Primary elections are held in every state for selecting the candidates for local, state and congressional elections. This method is useful against the nomination process of the party candidates.¹⁴

3) Run-off Elections or Second Ballot Elections or Two-Round System (TRS)

This method is commonly practiced in presidential elections but in some of the countries it is also used for the election of the members of the lower house. This method is applied so that to discourage the election of a candidate on minority votes. When a candidate gets absolute majority (50% or above) in the first round of elections, then he is declared winner. When no candidate gets absolute majority in the first round, then a second round of election is being held between two candidates having highest number of votes in the first ballot. The candidate, who secures the majority of votes in the second ballot, is declared as elected. This method is prevailed in twenty four states in the world. France,

Gabon, Haiti, Mali and Chad, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, North Korea, Cuba and Norway are some of the countries where this method of election is prevailed.¹⁵

4) Alternative Vote (AV) or Preferential Voting or Instant Runoff Voting¹⁶ (IRV) or Ranked Choice Voting or Single Transferable Voting (STV)

This method of election is used for large scale elections. In this method the voters rank the candidates for a given public office according to their order of preference in the form of first, second, third and so on depending on the number of the candidates in a constituency. In the count, the first preferences are counted and if it produces a clear majority (50% or more) of a candidate, then he is declared elected. If there is no clear majority then the candidate with lowest number of votes is eliminated and second preferences on his ballots are redistributed among the remaining candidates. Now the second preferences of the voters are counted and if it produces a clear majority of a candidate then he is declared elected. If not then the same process is kept continued until a candidate with clear majority is elected. This method is different from the second and exhaustive ballots, because in this method the voters cast vote once while in others the voter cast votes at each stage.¹⁷ This method is prevailed in Australia and Ireland. It avoids revisits of the voters to the polling stations and possible reduction in turnout due to voter tiredness.¹⁸

For example, there is an electoral contest of four candidates naming W, X, Y, and Z. Assume 100 voters cast votes according to their order of preferences. The first preferences are counted and the result is as follows.

W = 31
X = 37
Y = 24
Z = 8

The above result shows that X is in majority but it is not more than 50%. Therefore, the lowest one i.e. Z is eliminated and the second preferences on Z's ballots are counted for W, X, and Y candidates and are added to the first preferences of the remaining candidates. Suppose the second preferences on Z's 8 ballots for W is five, for X is two and for Y is one. Then the final count will be as.

W = 31+5=36
X = 37+2=39
Y = 24+1=25

The above result shows that X is in majority but it is not more than 50%. Therefore, the lowest one i.e. Y is eliminated and the above method is repeated. Suppose the third preferences on Y's 25 ballots for W is eighteen and for X is eight. Then the final count will be as.

$$\mathbf{W} = 36+15=51$$

$$\mathbf{X} = 39+10=49$$

Thus W emerges with an absolute majority which is more than 50%.¹⁹

5) **Special Elections**

When a public office is vacated due to death or retirement of a member, then special elections are conducted so that to elect the member for the vacated seat. These elections are also held when a member becomes ineligible or when general elections in a constituency are regarded as invalid due to some irregularities. The term special election is applied in USA while in Britain such elections are called as by-elections.²⁰

6) **Referendum**

It is the combination of two Latin words i.e. 'referenda' which means to 'refer' and 'dum' which means 'people'. So it means something refer to the people for approval. When a public policy issue or government actions or proposed law or the issue of constitutional amendment is directly placed to the public for voting, then this is called as referendum. In the referendum usually two choices are provided in the form of accept or reject or yes or no on a particular issue. In USA an election will be called a referendum, when the legislature places the issue to the voters for voting. A referendum will be regarded as null and void if it is invalidated by the judiciary through judicial review.²¹

7) **Recall election:**

Recall election refers to the type of elections in which the voters remove a public official from his office before the expiry of his term by casting direct votes against him. Prior to the holding of this election, the voters sign a petition showing the decision of the removal of the public official. It is also called as recall referendum or representative recall. This type of election is usually practiced in Canada, Switzerland, USA etc.²²

8) **Initiative:**

Initiative is an election procedure in which a specified number of the registered voters sign a petition for forcing popular vote on a proposed law, constitutional amendment or public policy issues. It is also called as popular or

citizens' initiative. Initiative election is carried out so that the matter is forced by the public to be considered by executive or legislature. The initiative may be direct or indirect. Under direct method, the matter is directly placed for popular vote after signing the petition by the voters. This direct method is called initiative. Under indirect method, the petition is signed and the matter is submitted in the legislature. If the legislature does not enact law on it, then the legislature placed the issue to the voters for voting. This indirect method is called referendum in USA. It is practiced in USA, France, Switzerland, Ireland and in many European countries.²³

9) Direct and Indirect Elections

In direct elections the voters directly cast their vote and elect the candidate of their choice. In indirect elections the voters elect the electoral body which then elects the candidate to fill the public office. Here the voters indirectly elect the members of the legislatures. Most of the upper houses of the legislature and the presidents (E.g. USA President) are indirectly elected.

10) Local Elections

Elections conducted at local level are termed as local elections. These elections are held under plurality systems. Its aim is to elect the public office holders at local level so that to delegate power to the people at gross root level. The method of local elections varies from state to state. Political activities at local level provide an opportunity to the politicians to learn politics for becoming a seasoned and experience politician at national level.²⁴

Conclusion

Election is a decision-making process in which the people elect members of the electoral body for holding public office(s). It represents the will of the people in a democratic state. Its periodical observance strengthens democracy and embeds civilized political culture and values in a democratic state. Elections were for the first time practiced in the Athenian democracy where pebbles were cast in a pitcher for carrying out the process of elections. With the passage of time the process became complex. As a result, various forms of elections emerged in the world. These forms of elections include general elections, primary elections, run-off elections, alternative vote, special elections, referendum, recall elections, initiative, direct and indirect elections and local elections. The practice of these forms of elections depends upon the political and electoral set up of a country. For example, primary elections are usually held in USA in which the registered members of a political party cast votes so that to select candidates for participating in next general elections. Similarly, for run-off elections France is famous for it. In the same way the method of alternative vote is prevailed in Australia and Ireland. Likewise, the method of recall elections is usually

practiced in Canada, Switzerland and USA. All these forms of elections represent the popular will which have a great force in a democratic state.

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- ⁴ *Chamber's Encyclopedia*, vol.5 (London: International Learning Systems Corporation Limited, 1973), pp.43-44.
- ⁵ At that time the Athenian democracy was direct rather than representative. The Greek theorists thought that in direct democracy everyone has equal rights. They regarded representative democracy as oligarchic because here public is ruled by few.
- ⁶ *The Encyclopaedia Americana*, vol.X (USA: Grolier Incorporated, 1987), "Election," by Milton C. Cummings, p.116
- ⁷ John Gastil, *By Popular Demand: Revitalizing Representative Democracy through Deliberative Elections* (London: University of California Press, 2000), p.11; In a modern state the representative offices are filled by elections and the offices of special skills (armed forces) are filled by appointment. This is in contradiction to the election practiced in Greek city-state. In Greece the public offices were filled by appointments while the offices of special skills were filled by elections.
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