Understanding Democracy and Elections

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Introduction

I welcome you to Unit 1: Understanding Democracy and Elections. This Unit has many interesting things for you. In the first place, I will give you some definitions of elections. I will also help you know the various types of election. Another lively thing you will know is the functions elections perform in a democracy. Do you know that voting is an important aspect of every election? So, I will examine the different forms of voting, their advantages and disadvantages. Before that, I will take you through some of the theories of voting.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to

- give your own definition of elections;

- distinguish between the different types of elections

- know the role elections play in a democracy

- identify the theories of voting

Section 1   Defining Democracy

Introduction

This section is different from all that you have read in other courses because it discusses one of the important concepts in the political science discipline. As you all know, democracy is a common word to all of you. Everywhere, people are talking about it. What is striking about it is that everybody want to behave and act in a manner that will be described as democratic. This means that the word is now the measuring device for all governments and those in elective or leadership positions. So I don't want to wet your appetite, so let us go into the meaning of democracy.

Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- explain what democracy means

- mention the classical definition of democracy

- outline the salient elements of democracy

- identify democratic consolidation

Classical Definition of Democracy

Democracy means different things to different people; but what constitutes democracy ultimately is the expression of the will of the people. However, as one defines democracy, it is a system of government in which authority to exercise power derives from the will of the people (Odukoya 2007: 148, 152). For example, Diamond and Plattner (1999: xi) define democracy as "a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realms of citizens, acting indirectly through competition and cooperation of their elected representatives". But if democracy is to take roots, thrive and endure, then certain procedural and institutional conditions must be met and civil and political rights must be recognized and observed. A political system which is incapable of imposing such limitations on itself and fails to abide by the rule of law regarding its procedures cannot be described as democratic (Schmitter and Karl 1993: 40-45).

Democracy, then, provides for meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of governmental power

through regular, free, and fair elections ; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and a level of civil and political liberties sufficient to ensure that citizens can develop and advocate their views and interests and contest policies and offices vigorously (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995: 6). Similarly, Dahl (1971: 3; 1982: 11) identifies, among other things, multiparty elections regularly and fairly conducted, universal adult suffrage, the right to run for elective offices in government, freedoms of expression and of association as well as the citizen' s right to seek out alternative sources of information, as critical conditions for democracy (or what he calls polyarchy).

Elements of Democracy

In purely formal sense, democracy can be characterized as a system in which institutions constrain the behaviour of political elites. And studying the interactions between elites and their institutional environments provide an effective starting point for understanding democratic regimes. The extent to which elites variously follow, bend, break or subvert governing institutions provides a testimony as to how effectively democracy is operating in a particular context. And the character and performance of institutions have real consequences for the fate of democratic regimes. In some cases, institutional arrangements have given elites incentives to support the democratic system; in other cases, they have undermined possibilities for elite habituation to democratic rule (Villalon and Von Doepp 2005: 2-3).

Democracy is often seen as that article of faith that produces political legitimacy, brings good governance and addresses issues of human development (Dumor 1998: 21) but it may well be Janus-faced. While democracy can empower citizens, overcome exclusion and contribute to good governance, it can also become a tool of powerful economic interests, reinforce societal inequalities, penalize minorities, awaken dormant conflicts and fail to broaden popular participation (Bastian and Luckham 2003: 1). While democracy may be a device for engineering solutions to political and societal problems, it has its own enduring contradictions as a system of governance; while powerful actors usually have disproportionate influence, democracy can still, within limits, provide the powerless and the underprivileged with channels for collective political action to challenge their subordination and exploitation. While democracy has value in its own right it has its emancipatory as well as even subversive potential (Bastian and Luckham 2003: 1-2).

Democratic institutions and elected governments may or may not open spaces for democratic politics; they may or may not be responsive to the political demands of the poor, women and

minorities; they may or may not facilitate the management of conflicts (Bastian and Luckham 2003: 3). This is particularly so when an elected government is held hostage to global markets and control a diminished public sphere in which to act on behalf of citizens (Bastian and Luckham 2003: 2). Where democratic institutions fail to meet the material expectations of the people, instilling the norms, rules and procedures that govern democratic action becomes problematic, if not futile. Such failure could breed popular disenchantment as well as mass cynicism about the institutional foundation of democracy and lead eventually to its corruption (Ninsin 2006: 203).

Democratic institutions are never introduced in a political and social vacuum; they come into being within specific historical contexts, national societies and cultures which condition factors that give rise to demands for democracy, shape institutional forms, influence whether or not it is consolidated, and determine how and on whose behalf it functions in each national context (Bastian and Luckham 2003: 2). Chabal (1998: 297-8) also draws attention to a cultural dimension to democracy which among other things entails a democratic mentality by which rulers and the ruled are in accord over both the desirability and efficiency of the political system. Closely related is a widespread acceptance of the democratic norms of accountability - the mechanism by which rulers are made to account to the ruled for their political actions. In countries with no democratic traditions (or with traditions of democratic failure), there are no intrinsic or historical reasons for trusting the democratic system to deliver a way out of political and economic crises. Democracy, then, is the end result of a long and complex political process.

Democracy also entails mechanisms for political change - the legal and constitutional framework which ensures that elected governments govern and defeated governments leave office. This includes the terms and length of political mandates as well as the conditions under which elections are held and their results implemented. Above all, it concerns the mechanisms to ensure the regularity of political change by means of recognizably valid elections (Chabal (1998: 296).

Although democracy is a system with a well-defined, well regulated constitutional, legal procedural and institutional framework, what makes it work may not be so much that framework as the general consensus within the society about the legitimacy and efficacy of the democratic political order (Chabal 1998: 299). In addition, political actors in a democracy must exercise moderation in political positions and partisan identifications, civility of political discourse and a willingness to compromise with political opponents (Diamond, Linz and Lipset 1995: 19). Democracy is thus an

inherently fragile political system; where consensus dissolves, the whole political order is in jeopardy (Chabal 1998: 296).

Democracy and elections

While there are many views on what democracy is or ought to be, a common denominator among modern democracies is elections. More importantly, elections are an institutionalized attempt to actualize the essence of democracy: rule of the people by the people. Every modern definition of representative democracy includes participatory and contested elections perceived as the legitimate procedure for the translation of rule by people into workable executive and legislative power. By studying the electoral processes – the campaign, polling day, the immediate response to the results, the acceptance or rejection of the outcome by various groups – we study the mechanism for translating people' s power to rule into governmental power(Lindberg 2006: 1-2). To a large extent, therefore, elections and democracy have become virtually synonymous in Western political thought and analysis. The most influential formulations of democracy emphasize the opportunities for the electorate to choose periodically among elites competing for political office (Joseph 1999: 9).

Elections, clearly promote both participation and competition and that makes them a defining institution of democracy. Indeed for most analysts, the convocation of elections for a head of government and a national assembly (provided that these are free and fair and that the losers accept the results) is sufficient to found a democratic regime (Bratton & Posner 1999: 378). In a democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed and the principal mechanism for translating that consent into governmental authority is the holding of free and fair elections (http://www.factsabout.com/e/el/election.html). In a crucial sense, elections are an institution to ensure that democracy works (Schumpter 1950; Ninsin 2006: 194).

While the practice of regular elections establishes precedents for deepening democracy, multiparty elections in and of themselves cannot guarantee a transition to democracy, let alone the survival of a democratic political order. This is because countries that hold reasonably competitive elections may lack constitutional limits on governmental power, deprive citizens of basic rights, or lack tolerance of religious and/or ethnic minorities. Indeed, in some circumstances elections can sharpen ethnic differences or exacerbate communal tensions. Thus the transition to democracy will require more than mere holding regular multi-party elections (Chabal 1998: 296). Indeed, ' bona fide democratic states …come into existence as a result of overall development of society,

including the creation of viable institutions of civil society, a free press and an independent, dedicated and resolute judiciary as well as sound legislature' (Tekle 1997, cited in Ayee 1998: 537-8). But Bratton (1998: 52) argues that while it is possible to have elections without democracy, it is impossible to have democracy without elections. The important point, however, is that to over-state the importance of elections is to commit what Terry Karl (1986; 1990; 1995) calls ' the fallacy of electoralism' – giving elections too much weight and ignoring other dimensions of democracy.

While elections and democracy are not synonymous, elections nonetheless remain fundamental, not only for the installation of democratic governments, but for broader democratic consolidation. The regularity, openness and acceptability of elections signal whether basic constitutional, behavioural and attitudinal foundations are being laid for sustainable democratic rule. It is, therefore, meaningful to study elections for the simple reason that we cannot have democracy without elections (Bratton & Posner 1999: 379); and ' no other institution precedes participatory, competitive, and legitimate elections in instrumental importance for self-government' (Lindberg 2006: 1-2). At the same time, as Schmitter and Karl (1991: 78) caution, ' however central to democracy, elections occur intermittently and only allow citizens to choose between the highly aggregated alternatives offered by political parties' .

Democratic Consolidation

The concept of ' democratic consolidation' defies clear-cut definition. Rather, as Schedler (1998: 91) rightly points out, it has acquired a confusing array of meanings and has broadened in scope from the simplistic mechanistic test of successive transfer of power to encompass the deeper requirement for what democracy should entail.

From the broader and deeper perspective, Linz and Stepan (1997: 15) describe the consolidation phase of democracy as a period when ' the overwhelming majority of the people (come to) believe that any further political change must emerge from within the parameters of democratic procedures …when all of the actors (are) habituated to …(conflict resolution by) established norms …and violation of these norms are likely to be both ineffective and costly' . It is ' a political regime in which democracy …has become, in a phrase ' the only game in town' , behaviourally, attitudinally and constitutionally' (Linz and Stepan, 1997: 15). ' Behaviourally' because no significant actors attempt to use non-democratic means to obtain a political goal; ' attitudinally' because democratic procedures and institutions are considered by the vast majority to be the preferred way of organizing politics, and

'constitutionally' because actors, both governmental and non-governmental, are subject to the laws and institutions of the democratic process (Linz and Stepan, 1997: 6).

Similarly, Diamond (1994: 15) sees consolidation as the 'process by which democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down. It involves behavioural and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics and narrows its uncertainty'. At the consolidation stage of democracy, major sections of the political public, the political elites, political parties, civil society organizations as well as the vast majority of the masses are firmly committed to the democratic constitutional system and regularly comply with its rules and constraints (Diamond 2000). Gunther and others (1986) and Burton et al (1995) have all defined democratic consolidation emphasizing widespread belief in the legitimacy of political institutions, competitive elections as framework for contesting power, and adherence to the democratic rules of the game.

From these and other definitions a number of features of democratic consolidations stand out: One, democratic consolidation entails the elimination of authoritarian enclaves, stabilization of the electoral rules and routinization of pluralist politics such that a return to past authoritarian politics is rendered politically unfeasible (Schedler 1998; Jonah 2001: 88). Two, democratic consolidation requires the expansion of citizen access to information, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training and the functions civil society, as well as political institutionalization(Ayee 2001: 435). Three, a consolidated democracy requires that democratic institutions are not only built but also valued. While democracy can be installed without democrats it cannot be consolidated without them and while democracy may survive in the short run, it will only last when political actors learn to cherish rule by the people and exhibit a willingness to stand for it (Bratton and Walle 1997: 279). Four, the belief in the democratic regime must encompass the elite and the masses. At both levels, there must be broad consensus that cuts across class, ethnic, nationality, and other cleavages on the legitimacy of the constitutional system, however poor or unsatisfying its performance may be at any point in time. And even as they conflict and compete intensely, trust and cooperation must grow among political competitors (Diamond 1999b: 65). Closely related, no political system experiences democratic consolidation when democracy resides only in the formal political arena and is not deepening in the wider society and where there is little or no progress in the understanding of democracy beyond its electoral rendition of mere enfranchisement at periodic intervals (Amuwo 2003: 152). Lastly, democratic consolidation is not reducible to quick fixes. Even under broadly favourable conditions, it normally takes time and effort to develop democracy and democratic

institutions to the point of consolidation (Haynes 2001: 4; Amuwo 2003: 156,169). This is because the change of people's attitude and values and the institutionalization of democratic practice are unlikely to be achieved quickly. Democratic consolidation, then, is a long-term process and may take several decades (Bratton and Walle 1997: 235).

Perhaps the more popular, but largely shallow, rendition of 'democratic consolidation' is Samuel Huntington's two-turnover test – a mechanistic test as to whether a country has achieved two peaceful party alternation of power. This refers to a situation in which the party or group that takes power in the initial election at the time of transition (founding election) lose a subsequent election and turns over power to those election winners and when those election winners then peacefully turnover power to the winners of a later election (Huntington 1991: 266-267). To him, while the first electoral turnover has only symbolic significance, the second shows that two major groups of political leaders in society are sufficiently committed to democracy to surrender office and power after losing an election. Thus, in the wake of two cycles of political replacement, most political actors have lived both as winners and losers without revolting. This signals their acceptance of the rules of the electoral game (Huntington 1991: 266-267).

Huntington's two-turnover test has its merits: first, it emphasizes the significance of elections in a democracy and second, it is easy to operationalize: multiparty elections are discrete events that hold relatively little ambiguity, (even though judging their freeness and fairness may in practice be slippery) (Bratton and Walle 1997: 234). And, perhaps, more than any other political event, a peaceful turnover from one group of governors (political party) to another has beneficial effects on democratic attitude and helps to legitimize democracy. Particularly in emerging democracies, successive turnovers institutionalize uncertainty of electoral outcomes, lessen the apparent invincibility of incumbents, and enhance the confidence of the electorate in the electoral system.

But there are limitations as well. In the first place, Huntington goes too far in reducing democratic consolidation to power alternation. On the one hand, it is possible to have several competitive, free and fair elections without alternation in power; and on the other, the two alternations could take place in three successive elections, a period too short for democratic institutions to take roots and for the political actors, both elite and mass, to imbibe and internalize the ethos of democracy. Moreover, regular multiparty elections may co-exist with systematic abuses of human rights or disenfranchisement of large sections of the population (Bratton and Walle 1997: 235). Above all, elections, even if regularly and fairly conducted, do not, in and of themselves, create a consolidated democracy. Institutions other than elections are also required for

democracy's long term prosperity. For democracy to truly take root, civil rights and due process of law must be respected, and institutions such as independent legislature and judiciary and a free press, etc, must be present, among other things (Bratton and Posner 1999: 379).

By Huntington's 'two-turnover test', Ghana by Election 2008 attained democratic consolidation. The NDC after two terms (1993-2001) was defeated in the 2000 elections by the NPP which was re-elected in 2004. In 2008, the NDC after two terms in the political wilderness recaptured power in the closest-fought elections. Significantly, on both occasions of alternation of power, the defeated incumbent peacefully yielded power. But as this study shall reveal, there are still a number of democratic deficits to be addressed.

☑ **Activity 1.1**

1. Carefully define democracy and articulate its important features.

2. To what extent would you see a connection between elections and democracy?

Summary

It is clear from what I have discussed with you that democracy involves choosing representatives to govern the affairs of a country. It also means respect for individuals' rights and freedoms. We can then say that election is one of the pillars of any democratic system. So a country is adjudged democratic when it makes elections a regular feature of its political activities.

Section 2   Definitions and Types of Elections

Introduction

You are welcomed to Section 1 which deals with the Definition of Election. This section will focus on the meaning of elections. But before I do that, I will explain the term elections. This is important to know because election has become a regular activity of this country, and even as a student, you are always called to vote to choose your school leaders. Even in your church, you have been voting for your leaders. So, come with me, and have some ideas about how election has been defined by some scholars.

Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- give your own meaning of the term, ' elections

- outline briefly, the various types of elections

- define elections in your own words

Definitions of Elections

I have already told you that a definition of election is important for this course. I must inform you that elections lie at the heart of any political process or democracy. So what is this concept called elections? One of the definitions says that election is a means of choosing leaders and disposing old ones in a political system. So you see, we can say that election is the process of choosing a person to hold political office. It is the act of selecting those who will govern us through the process of voting. Because election does not just happen but it takes place by careful arrangements with rules to be followed, some scholars have indicated that, election is a formal and organized choice by voters of a person for public office. It is a choice because, there may be several options made available for the people to decide on the one they want. Therefore, election is a means of making decisions by citizens of a country. That is why one scholar puts his definition of election as the formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual to hold a public office.

What are the Types of Election?

Now that I have explained the term election' , I will turn to the types of elections. I must let you know that there are several types of elections. I am going to describe each type to you, so come with me, now!

- **Partisan election** – this is the type of election where candidates compete for offices or positions through political parties. The candidates campaign and promote their ideas and visions through their affiliated political parties. In this case, they undertake their political mobilizations – canvass for support and votes through their political parties.

- **Non-partisan election**- it is the type of election in which ballots are cast to choose individuals not on account of their relation with a political party. Rather, the individual candidates present themselves to the people to be elected on the basis of their own abilities, skills, competencies and expertise in a particular community or national life.

- **Recall election**- As the you know, the name recall suggest that a candidate has been sent to a public office and later withdrawn by those who put him/her in that position. So, the term means withdrawal of support for an elected office holder for some reasons. It is one of the means by which citizens can remove an elected official from office before his or her term of office comes to an end. There is a formal process and procedure involved in the removal of a representative. Usually, some of the citizens may send a petition to the president and Speaker of the legislative House to complain about a misconduct of their representative. Once an investigation has proven that the petitioners have a strong case against their candidate, he/she may be withdrawn from the office position.

- **By-election** - it is a type of election that is organized to replace an elected office holder who has lost his or her position. The vacancy may occur as a result of death, resignation, dismissal, recall or promotion into another office. In each of these instances, a fresh election will be held to choose another person to fill the vacancy.

- **Referendum**- it is an election held to determine the people' s preference for a particular issue in a country. Usually, referenda are held in the entire nation rather than a small area. For instance, a particular national issue that must be approved by a majority of the voting citizens may be put on a referendum.

- **Plebiscite** – on like referendum, this type of election is the one where voters in a small territory, such as region or constituency are called upon to make a decision on an important issue. In other words, this is an election that is held for voters to determine or make their preference for an issue (that might be national in character) but is determined or organized at a limited geographical area.

☑ Activity 2.1

1. What are Elections?

2. Carefully distinguish between Election, Referendum and Plebiscite.

Summary

I have explained that election is the process for selecting representatives to govern the affairs of the people. I also told you that act of choosing office holders. You have seen that elections take several forms. I named some of them in the discussion including by-election, referendum and plebiscite.

Section 3   Democratic Elections

Introduction

You have now moved to Section 2 of Unit 1. I will take you through a discussion of what we often hear in Ghanaian politics, free and fair elections. I will identify the important elements of an election that we can describe as free and fair. This section helps you to know more about what constitute acceptable elections. It has not been too difficult for scholars to agree on the elements of free and fair elections. So let us look at them one after the other.

Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- outline the salient elements of free and fair elections

- identify the elements that have worked well in Ghana

- indicate those that are common in Ghana' s electoral politics

Free and Fair Elections

In any liberal democracy, everybody expects elections to go in a certain direction. One of the things we often hear about the conduct of elections is whether it was **free** and **fair**. I will spend some time to explain to you what the two words mean:

Free elections will require the observance of fundamental civil liberties - these would include freedom of speech and association, a free press and the right to join, stand for and vote for a political party of one' s individual choice.

Fair elections will operate under the key principle of " one person, one vote, one value" ; that is, every citizen' s vote will have the same value as another citizen' s. Moreover, electoral laws should be unbiased and be overseen by an independent and impartial judiciary.

In reality, however, elections have no single character; they are neither simple mechanisms of public accountability nor a means of ensuring political control. Like all channels of political communication, elections are a ' two-way street' that provide the government and the people, the elite and the masses, with the opportunity to influence one another.

All modern democracies hold elections, but not all elections are democratic. Right-wing dictatorships and one party regimes also stage elections to give their rule the aura of legitimacy, but in such elections, there may be only one candidate or a list of candidates, with no alternative choices. Such elections may offer several candidates for each office, but ensure through intimidation or rigging that only the government-approved candidate is chosen. Other elections may offer genuine choices – but only within the incumbent party; all of these are not democratic elections (**http://www.factsabout.com/e/el/election.html**).

Democratic elections are not merely symbolic; they are competitive, periodic, inclusive, definitive elections in which the chief decision makers in a government are selected by citizens who enjoy broad freedom to criticize government, to publish their criticism and present alternatives (**http://www.factsabout.com/e/el/election.html**). In democratic elections opposition parties and candidates must enjoy the freedom of speech, assembly, and movement necessary to voice their criticisms of the government openly and to bring alternative policies and candidates to the voters. Simply permitting the opposition access to the ballot is not enough, and even worse is where the opposition is barred from the air waves, its rallies harassed or its newspapers censured. While, the party in power may enjoy the advantages of incumbency, the rules and conduct of the election must be fair (**http://www.factsabout.com/e/el/election.html**).

Democracies do not elect dictators or life-presidents, and elected officials must return to the voters at prescribed intervals to seek their mandate to continue, and must accept the risk of being voted out of office. To be inclusive, the electorate in democratic elections must cover a large proportion of the adult population. Democracies thrive on openness and accountability, the act of voting itself must be secret to ensure a free ballot and minimize the opportunity for intimidation. At the same time, the protection of the ballot and tallying of vote must be conducted as openly as possible, so that citizens are confident that the results are accurate and that the government does, indeed rest on their ' consent' (**http://www.factsabout.com/e/el/election.html**). The ground rules in democratic elections must encourage tolerance and civility in public debate; and the political competitors, both winners and losers, must continue to participate in public life with the knowledge that their roles are essential to the system. Democratic elections, after all, are not a fight for survival but a competition to serve (**http://www.factsabout.com/e/el/election.html**).

Elections are not legitimate just because certain procedures have been used fairly but when the actors involved consent and testify to its legitimacy (Lindberg 2006: 43). If incumbents say they support democratic elections and will respect the rules of the game, that is great, but the real test comes when they lose an election. If they immediately accept the outcome, concede defeat, and honour a peaceful alternation in power, it testifies to the legitimacy of the election in their view (Lindberg 2006: 43). Similarly, opposition may appear democratic enough by their statements and programmes, but if they refuse to accept the outcome of a free and fair election, the legitimacy of that election, regardless of its other qualities, is still inadequately established (Lindberg 2006: 43).

Losers' acceptance of results is important because what makes democracy work and persist may not be so much the success of winners as the restraint of the losers, who must accept both a distasteful outcome and the process that produced it (Anderson et al 2005: 9). Moreover, democratic maturity is best observed by how well those who are losing power live with that fact, by how leaders of defeated parties are willing to take blame for the results/outcome and by how voters even after defeat are willing to continue to exercise their right to make their voice heard. In particular, when political leaders and their supporters believe that they have lost an election fairly, they are more likely to focus on their inadequacies and on ways to improve their persuasiveness of their message in future (Whitehead 2006: 5). Losers' peaceful acceptance is a critical test of the system's legitimacy. It is only when an election is free and fair and also the losers accept the results that we can speak of manifestly legitimate elections (Lindberg 2006: 44).

Another indicator of electoral legitimacy is the absence of politically related violence during the campaign and on voting day. Relative peacefulness before, during, and after polling, measures the legitimacy of an electoral contest as a means of allocating political power. Use of violence is a core symptom of failed institutionalization. Assassination of opponents, voter intimidation, attacks against the liberty and property of political adversaries, violence against elected officials or electoral administrators, riots, and ethnic or other forms of ' social' cleansing are examples of serious politically motivated violence that that major actors do not see the elections as the legitimate means of selection for the highest political offices (Lindberg 2006: 44).

Lastly, a necessary element in an assessment of democratic quality is electoral regime survival; that electoral cycles continue. Coups, civil wars or any reversion into authoritarian/autocratic rule following an election are evidence that the cycle of elections has broken down and that key elite groups did not consider the election legitimate (Lindberg 2006: 45).

☑ Activity 3.1

1. List and briefly explain three characteristics of a competitive election.

2. To what extent would you say that Ghana' s 1992 elections were competitive?

Summary

I have informed you that people would like to see the conduct of an election to achieve free and fair outcome. I have already let you know that when the voters; roll, the procedures are transparent and ballot is secrete, the election can be regarded as free and fair. The discussions have indicated that as much as possible every election must be competitive. In other words, the elections must provide adequate opportunity for all parties, candidates and people/voters to actively participate in every process. This means that there should be act of intimidation, violence and more than one person or party should be involved in the contest.

Section 4   Functions of Elections

Introduction

Now that you have completed Section 3 let us go Section 4 of Unit 1. In this section, you will be taken through the functions elections perform in a democracy. In other words, I will show you how elections are important and that will encourage you to pay attention to elections in Ghana and all over the world. As you know, I shall discuss many of the things that show the importance of elections, so come with me now.

Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- indicate the factors that make elections important

- identify the various views about the importance of elections

- explain which of the factors makes elections a necessary activity to be carried out in a democracy

Scholars' Views on the Functions of Election

I must tell you that there are different views that have been expressed by scholars on the importance of elections. I will identify and discuss some of them to you. First, Harrop and Miller (1987) have explained two of such views of the functions of competitive elections.

- **The conventional view** which emphasizes the **bottom-up** dimension of an election. The view is that elections are a mechanism through which politicians can be called to account and made (somehow compulsory) to introduce policies that would reflect public opinion. This way, all competitors should be given the opportunity to present their platforms which will showcase their offers (policy options) to consumers (voters/electorate).

- **Radical view** emphasizes **top-down** issue that shape competitive elections. This view portrays elections as a means through which governments and political elites can exercise

control over their populations, making them obey, submissive and ultimately governable. These can be realised in an environment that provides opportunity for interested elite to engage each other to ascend to power.

Representation

In all representative democracy such as in Ghana, Nigeria, USA and United Kingdom, elections serve as the means by which a large group of people (the electorate) select a much smaller group of people (representatives) to act or govern on their behalf. For example, in the 2012 general elections, about 25 million adult voters in Ghana, elected a president and 275 Members of Parliament.

Legitimacy

I know the term legitimacy crossed your studies at level 100. As you may recall, legitimacy is expressed in terms of the rightfulness of a person to act or do something or govern. In any election one of the things that is expected is that it should create and be able to maintain legitimacy. This means that election gives those who have been selected an authority to make decisions and others things that should be obeyed by all. So, you see, it its election that provide a formal, organised way for citizens to ' consent' to being governed.

Choice of Government

Another role elections play in any democracy is that it is used to decide the composition of the government especially the legislature (in Ghana, Parliament). It is also used in some countries such as Ghana and USA to directly elect the executive (the President and his ministers). In this case, after any general election, the candidate that obtains more votes (as in presidential election) and the party that wins more seats (as in parliamentary election) is invited to form a government.

Popular Participation

Do you know that when you vote, you are engaging in political participation? So elections provide the means for people to get involve or participate in the making of important decisions in a country. For instance, in the advanced democracies such as USA and UK, voting in an election is the key act of political participation for most citizens, even though voting is non-compulsory.

Policy Influence and Creation of a Mandate

Unlike in military regimes where citizens do not have control over their government, in the case of a democracy, people have control on their government because of elections. Why, because elections allow the citizens to periodically express their opinion on government and party policies, which give them a clear means of influencing the political agenda. Ultimately, voters get to vote for the party offering a package of policies that best represents their own values and interests. When a candidate or party is defeated in an election, it can make it 'rethink' its policies that have proven unpopular at the polls and redesign ones that meet their needs. In the case of **mandate,** it is the authority a party that wins an election have to implement the program that it presented to the electorate during the election campaign.

Education of Voters and Citizens

We are still on the role or functions elections play in a democracy. We are focusing on what elections do for voters. During elections, voters receive education on many things about democracy such as how to vote, why to vote for parties and the manifestoes the parties prepare to become the blueprint to govern when they win elections

All these help voters to make a more informed choice on election day.

Recruitment of Political Class

Elections provide the means for recruiting the elite. When a country organizes an election, voters choose the politicians who contest on their political parties to lead the people. For instance, after elections those who win from their constituencies and a candidate that wins the presidential contest get the opportunity to pick his.her team of ministers and other bureaucrats to govern the affairs of the state for a period.

☑ ## Activity 1.5

1. What functions do elections perform in a democracy?

2. Which of these factions do you regard as critical for Ghanaian voter?

Summary

This section has been an interesting one because it has discussed the importance of elections. I said that elections allow people to participate in the making of decisions, provide legitimacy for those who govern peaceful means of changing leaders, because it helps to select a few people who get the mandate to rule. Voters are educated in the course of elections and the elite are recruited to political office positions.

Section 5   Theories of Voting Behaviour

Introduction

You see, all too soon, we have completed Section 5 and are now on Section 6 of Unit 1. Come with me to know voting. We will hear some theories that tell us different things about voting. For instance, you will be told about the different voting behaviours of people. What motivates people to vote? In other words, what inform or shape voters' voting decisions?

Objectives

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- know what voting means

- identify the different shades of opinions about voting

- outline the system of vote counting

- explain the factors that determine how a person vote

What is Voting?

Voting is an important aspect of an election. It occurs at the end of the election process. It is process of casting a ballot to pick a political party or candidate. In many liberal democracies, voting is a secrete act where the voter goes to the polling booth to make a her choice or preference for the candidate.

Party Identification Model

People vote because they have psychological attachments to parties or feeling of a particular party. This feeling influence them to vote. This motivates them to vote for that party. This attachment is gained from political socialization of the individual through the family. This attachment cannot be erased so easily. These people are not bothered about the other parties to even know about their policies. This makes such people overly partisan. Later socialization reinforces people's interest in a particular party. Most of these people have no tangible reasons why they belong to a party. Partisanship influences every aspect of their life.

There are advantages one gets from voting on the basis of attachments to political parties. It makes election outcome predictable. This results in political parties having strongholds. This concept of strongholds is base on party identification. People claim ownership of their political party, e.g. NDC and NPP have this advantage. Voters vote for a particular political party and not for the candidate.

Less money is spent in such areas where political parties have strongholds. Ethic calculation also influences party attachment (e.g. Volta Region (NDC) and Ashanti Region (NPP).

Unfortunately, this model failed to consider the importance of issues in voting. If one look at the model, the conclusion that one can make is that if the practice continues, the danger is that it can lead to conflict because people take entrenched partisan position over all issues. When this happens, politics and issues are dominated by sentiments that can encourage unnecessary disagreements, quarrels and if not check may steep into conflicts and sometimes violence.

Sociological Model

This model links voting to groups membership. People vote base on the interest of the group they belong. It assumes that voters belong to groups and that the group's interest influences their voting behaviour. Sociological model assumes that individual relate to each other through groups. The values of the groups determine the group's perspective. Some of the values of the groups may include, age, ethnicity, religion, region, race, gender, working class (lower, upper and middle class). Individuals' membership of a group determines their voting pattern. The groups values, norms, interests must be shared by a political party before they will vote for such a party. In other words people vote for political parties that share their group's values, norms, interests and aspirations. Islamic Association, Christians Association, Student Associations, etc. It over emphasised the importance of groups, it overlooks individuals attachment to a political party, it overlooks the importance of issues based voting. In other words it overlooks the fact that people vote on issues. The straitjacket categorization is no more relevant because there has been a realignment or shift from class or groups. This is because people belong to more than one group, and political parties may be made up of more than one group. It overlooks the importance of issues based voting. In other words it overlooks the fact that people vote on issues.

Dominant-ideology model

Radical theories of voting tend to highlight the degree to which individual choices are shaped by a process of ideological manipulation and control. In some respects, such theories resemble the sociological model in that voting is seen to reflect a person' s position in a social hierarchy. Where these theories differ from the sociological model, however, is in emphasizing that 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.

If voters' attitudes conform to the tenets of a dominant ideology, parties will not be able to afford to develop policies that fall outside their ideology. In this way, far from challenging the existing distribution of power and resources in society, the electoral process tends to uphold it. 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.

Rational choice model

This model begins by saying that people vote because of their personal interest or self-interest. It assumes that voting is a rational activity which is base on individual rational choice. It shifts from the sociological and the party identification model. Individuals vote because they have recognized that the political parties can delivery well. The individual is informed by his or her own assessment of the party' s abilities and capacity to deliver and not on their attachment or feeling for a party or the interest of the group they belong to.

It is also known as issue-based voting. The voting is based on the issues at hand and the policies of political parties and candidates. According to Prof. V. O. Key Jnr. Individuals are rational decision makers. Voters vote retrospective voting by looking back to recount the performance of candidate and make their voting decisions. They punish an underperformed candidate by voting him or her out and vote for one that can perform and they reward performed candidate by re-voting for them or voting them in.   This reflects the skirt and blouse voting in Ghana.

Advantages of Rational Choice Model include the following: It emphasise the importance of issues or policies in voting. It indicates that voters are rational beings who will not vote on emotions rather they examine the campaign issues including the policy documents and promises which candidates line up to pursue for the people when they win elections. This way, voters are better

informed about the alternative offered them by the parties and candidates before casting their ballots. However, the model tends to overlook the importance of group's interest and personal attachment to a party.

Systems of Vote Counting

After voters have cast their ballots, the next stage of the election process is counting of all votes cast for candidates. Scholars have offered a number of explanations to help us understand the different forms or ways of counting of ballots. They are explained below:

Simple plurality – a candidate must obtain more votes than other candidates to win the election. For example if after balloting, one candidate has obtained more votes than all the other contestants, the one with more votes is declared the winner.

Majority vote system- the winner must obtain more than 50% of the votes.

Absolute majority- in order to win, the candidate must obtain 2/3 or 70% of the valid vote cast.

Single transferable vote- the candidates are listed on a ballot and the voters are asked to rank them in order of preference. A candidate that is high among all contestants wins the ballot.

Proportional representation- it is a type of vote which is used to distribute seats in proportion to the distribution of the popular vote cast.

Summary

In this section, I have explained several issues about the different theoretical basis for voting. In other words, you have understood what voting is and why people vote and what shape their voting decisions. I have also engaged you on the forms of voting. These will enhance your understanding of voting, particularly to distinguish between the various aspects of voting and voters' behaviours.

Activity 5.1

1. Identify and briefly explain the theories of voting.

2. Which of these theories agrees with your own voting behaviour?

Unit Summary

We have explained in this unit the various aspects of Democracy and Elections which form the basis of understanding elections in Ghana, We have learnt about various definitions of democracy and elections, types and functions of elections. Now get ready to study about elections in Ghana in the subsequent units.