The Role of Elections in Democracy: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract: Elections are pivotal for democratic governance, allowing citizens to influence officials and chart the nation's trajectory. This study explores their crucial significance and inherent limitations. Despite their central role, elections often struggle to fully encapsulate the collective will, contending with challenges like elite dominance and the delicate balancing act between majority rule and minority rights. Furthermore, this research underscores the essential role of informational Democracy, where equitable access to information empowers citizens, fostering informed decision-making and holding governments accountable. In essence, while elections serve as the bedrock of political systems, acknowledging and addressing their limitations and fervently working to enhance the representation of diverse voices are imperative tasks for the ongoing evolution of democratic processes.

Keywords: Elections, Democracy, Representation Challenges, Elite Dominance, Informational Democracy

1. Introduction

This research explores the intricate relationship between governments and citizens, with elections as its central focus. It aims to uncover nuances, address challenges, and offer insights to refine the democratic process. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how elections shape nations and citizens' destinies [1-3]. Elections are universally recognized as the cornerstone of Democracy, enabling citizens to exercise control over their government elected officials and shape their nation's course. They establish a vital two-way communication channel between voters and representatives, legitimize government authority, and scrutinize its exercise.

Throughout history, political systems have evolved from authoritarian rule to Democracy and meritocracy, culminating in the widespread adoption of elections. In theory, elections are designed to gather and represent citizens' diverse opinions nationally and locally. However, they also possess inherent limitations that hinder their ability to capture the collective will fully.

This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between governments and citizens, highlighting elections as the primary means by which citizens control their government, select capable leaders, and eliminate ineffective ones. Elections promote social democratization by fostering two-way communication between the electorate and their representatives. A shared mission is to enhance this process and improve political and economic life through constructive exchanges.

In democratic institutions, power stems from the regular and open authorization of the people, primarily through elections. This grants modern public energy and places power under public supervision. Elections thus form the cornerstone of a modern civil society.

Over time, elections have become the prevailing method for forming governments and legislative bodies, serving multiple functions, including nationwide opinion gathering.

Despite their significant role in modern Democracy, elections face limitations in representing the general will amid complex political realities.

This research endeavours to illuminate the intricate dynamics between governments and citizens, with elections at its core. It seeks to uncover nuances, address challenges, and offer insights to refine the democratic process. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how elections shape nations and citizens' destinies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Significance of Elections in Democracy

The literature surrounding the role of elections in Democracy offers a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and dynamics inherent in this cornerstone of governance. Scholars such as Dahl, Manin, and Pitkin have extensively explored the concept of representation, shedding light on the intricate relationship between citizens and their governments [1-3]. Elections, as mechanisms for political representation, have been recognized for their capacity to empower citizens, legitimize authority, and foster a dialogue between the electorate and their representatives.

2.2. Limitations of Representative Election System

However, the limitations of the representative election system are a recurring theme in scholarly discussions. The tendency to amplify the voices of a select elite, as discussed by contributors to Wikimedia projects in 2001 and 2002, challenges the democratic ideal of equal representation. The complexities of bicameral legislation, exemplified by the United States Congress, underscore challenges in achieving a system that robustly represents the diversity of public opinion.

2.3. Insights from Political Theorists

The views of political theorists, such as Rousseau and Aristotle, further contribute to the discourse. Rousseau's emphasis on the general will and the challenge of reflecting it in a complex, diverse society resonates with the ongoing struggles observed in modern democracies. Aristotle's exploration of 'utilitarianism' within the context of 'city-state politics raises questions about the feasibility of collecting all citizens' ideas and the impact of social inequalities on election outcomes.

Marxist perspectives highlight power dynamics, with the bourgeoisie often maintaining control through a 'meritocracy system' [4]. The critique that ordinary proletarians struggle to influence the general will through the voting system adequately remains relevant in contemporary discussions.

John Locke's insights into the motivations behind forming a government and the trade-offs in sacrificing individual freedoms for collective protection highlight challenges in ensuring that the voting system reflects the people's will. The case study of the U.S., where the voting system may only partially align with Locke's vision, adds a practical dimension to these theoretical considerations [5].

2.4. Informational Democracy as a Potential Solution

The concept of 'Informational Democracy,' as discussed by [6-7], emerges as a crucial element in addressing the limitations of elections. The unrestricted access to unbiased information becomes a linchpin for informed decision-making and holding governments accountable. This dimension

highlights global disparities, such as the contrast between the U.S. and China in media freedom and political transparency.

2.5. Summary

In conclusion, the literature review highlights the multifaceted nature of the challenges surrounding elections in democracies. Scholars have provided valuable insights, from elite dominance and representational shortcomings to theoretical debates on the general will and practical issues of information access. The evolution of democratic systems requires continuous efforts to refine election mechanisms, enhance representation, and ensure that the collective will of diverse citizenries is effectively expressed.

3. Limitations of Representative Election System

First and foremost, the representative election system often falls short of fully capturing the collective will, primarily due to its tendency to amplify the ideas of a select few elites [8-9].

For example, the United States Congress has two branches: the Senate and the House of Representatives. However, during the presidential election, the electors often overlap with the members of Congress, which means that at the federal level, where legislation and administration cover nearly all national affairs, decision-making is effectively delegated to 535 individuals. This can weaken the representation, as these congressmen, who represent two-thirds of the state's "checks and balances" political system, may not fully represent the majority of the population as initially envisioned by the election system.

Additionally, the representative election system cannot entirely escape the influence of old disadvantages present in meritocracy and classic Democracy. For instance, in most nations with two-chamber legislation, like the United Kingdom and the U.S., there is always a privileged institution emphasizing the existence of the elites [8-9]. Taking the United States as an example, only two elites in each state are chosen for the Senate. Without a doubt, the highly educated, wealthy WASP group tends to dominate these positions. Systematic drawbacks also manifest in the "House of Commons." In the House of Representatives, while it appears to follow the tradition of "the minority obeying the majority," it does not imply that the majority is always correct due to 'the Tyranny of the Masses.' Moreover, the complex voting process in the House of Representatives can make the electoral system less efficient, especially in dealing with emergent issues.

Secondly, even though some voters believe that their will is represented in the election, due to the complexity of modern government's executive mechanisms, many non-elected positions may decisively influence legislative or other institutions formed through voting. For example, in the U.S. electoral system, one often overlooked role is that of the vice president, who is directly appointed by the President. The vice president possesses significant power and obligations to assist the President in managing various state affairs and making influential decisions for the nation and even the world in the President's absence [10]. However, the appointment of the vice president is a direct decision of the presidential candidate, which means that the general will of the people is not adequately reflected, as public attention primarily focuses on the presidential candidate during the election.

In even more adverse situations, in authoritarian states where elections may be mere symbolic gestures, the representation of the people's will is significantly limited compared to modern democratic systems. First, authoritarian states are often one-party states, such as DPRK, China, and Cuba. Due to the dictatorship over hierarchies within the party, the party's highest leadership often exercises overwhelming control. Taking China as an example, in the National People's Congress (NPC), approximately 99 percent of the voters are controlled by the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), specifically the standing committee of the Political Bureau, which is the highest-ranked power

institution. In such "authoritarian states," the representation mainly reflects the will of a small number of party members, and the decisions reached may not necessarily be just or correct. Second, unlike the democratic system in America, voting in authoritarian states involves multiple rounds of party screening, including the selection of representatives at the local, city, and state levels. In other words, the CPC eliminates many potential opponents during this process without any effective intervention from the NPC. However, it should be acknowledged that authoritarian states can efficiently manage emergencies, such as providing daily necessities during extreme natural disasters. Nonetheless, these issues and topics are largely unrelated to citizens' political engagement rights [1-3, 8-10]

4. Views of Voting and the Will of the People Based on Political Theorists

To delve deeper into the concept of the public will, this research draws upon the ideas of Rousseau and Aristotle, examining their perspectives on 'utilitarianism' within the context of 'city-state' politics. This implies that a state usually consists of a community, and a community is comprised of several families, with the individual as the basis of the organization. Rousseau distinguished the general will from individuals and groups' particular and often contradictory intentions. He sought to pursue a better life and was supportive of individual interests. However, to Rousseau's idea, contractarianism primarily aimed to address the issue of the state, with the state taking precedence over the individual.

Thus, several factors might be overlooked. Firstly, the issue of fairness adjustment demonstrates the difficulty of reflecting the general will, as the inequality of people's social status can lead to the domination of election results by the nobility, manipulating the public will. Secondly, collecting all citizens' ideas is unrealistic, given the potential size of the population. In contemporary times, many great powers utilize a 'meritocracy' system. While it cannot be denied that individuals chosen by this system often possess substantial knowledge, experience, and merit, only a few individuals cannot adequately represent all citizens' diverse perspectives. Therefore, the response to the people's will is limited. Evidently, Rousseau's concept prioritizes the nation, with sovereignty holding more significance than the government or individuals. In a democratic election, everyone contributes to the outcome. Nonetheless, if local governments are highly fragmented, it could lead to a concerning outcome where local rulers effectively replace national sovereignty, undermining the overarching government and the typical hierarchy [11-12].

Marxism posits that proletarians, who usually lack control over the means of production, constitute the leading group within society. Marx argued that technological advancements, with machines increasingly replacing human labour, would lead to widespread worker protests due to wage exploitation. However, the bourgeoisie, using a so-called 'meritocracy system,' maintains power and suppresses workers. Marx believed that ordinary proletarians represent the primary force in the community rather than the bourgeoisie. Therefore, these privileged individuals within the system cannot adequately reflect the general will through the voting system [4].

From John Locke's perspective, modern domestic voting struggles to align with his idea of why citizens choose to form a government from the free state of nature. Locke posited that governments are formed by ordinary individuals, with voters typically being citizens. According to Locke, the fundamental nature of the state implies that all individuals share inherent fairness. The absence of overwhelming power encourages individuals to mutually relinquish some of their freedoms, rights, and properties in exchange for government protection. In elections, those voters who sacrifice their property and freedom to establish the government's rule may only partly reflect their views on government administration. Therefore, the government may need to address their demands adequately. The voting system represents not only those who have made significant sacrifices but also those who have contributed less or even nothing. Democratic leaders like President Biden have implemented policies aimed at addressing the needs of minorities, including increasing the share of federal contracting dollars for all federal agencies by 20 percent, focusing on serving low-income and racial

minority populations. His administration has also sought to narrow the wealth gap by supporting blue-collar workers and imposing taxes on the wealthy. Consequently, the current voting system in most nations may only partially reflect the original will of the people when forming a government, as per Locke's perspective [5, 13].

5. Informational Democracy: Bridging the Gap Between Election Challenges and Informed Citizenship

As a pivotal theme in this study, Informational Democracy plays a crucial role in addressing the challenges of the electoral system. In delving into the intricacies of Informational Democracy, it is essential to highlight its positive impact on elevating voter information levels and enhancing government transparency.

Informational Democracy aims to ensure that voters have equal and unimpeded access to impartial information from diverse sources, including media, the Internet, and various communication channels. For instance, in the United States, BBC News reported on the legal issues faced by Hunter Biden, the living son of President Joe Biden, illustrating the freedom of the U.S. media to report on all details, including scandals involving the President, without fear of censorship or regulation. In contrast, in China, access to information is tightly controlled by the government, and scandals are often suppressed or deleted by state-controlled media outlets. Additionally, an institution known as the 'Central Guidance Commission for Building Spiritual Civilization of the Chinese Communist Party' is appointed to filter and oversee media content, limiting the expression of thoughts and opinions by individuals.

Within Informational Democracy, citizens can comprehensively and objectively understand candidates' platforms, past actions, and commitments. This transparency enables voters to make wiser, more rational choices based on comprehensive, unbiased information. In the U.S., the media can freely investigate and report on political candidates, revealing their past behavior and decisions and providing voters with a holistic view. In contrast, in environments with restricted information, voters may need help to fully grasp the comprehensive situation of candidates, leading to limitations in voting decisions.

Informational Democracy strengthens the political process by promoting public debate and scrutiny of government actions. In a fully transparent environment, voters and the public can actively engage in political discussions, pose questions and challenge decisions. This public participation not only helps maintain government transparency but also assists in addressing voter concerns about government actions.

Moreover, Informational Democracy plays a crucial role in preventing misinformation and manipulation. Transparency and widespread dissemination of information make it easier to expose and debunk false information. In this process, the public can better discern between true and false information, preventing external forces or malicious actors from negatively influencing the election process.

In conclusion, Informational Democracy emerges as a powerful tool for navigating the challenges inherent in the electoral system. Ensuring equitable access to unbiased information contributes to informed decision-making and holds governments accountable. As we transition to the concluding section, the interplay between Informational Democracy and the themes explored in earlier chapters sets the stage for a comprehensive understanding of how elections shape nations and citizens' destinies.

6.   Conclusion

In conclusion, elections remain the bedrock of modern democratic systems, serving as a fundamental mechanism through which citizens exert control over their governments and shape the trajectory of their nations. Despite their pivotal role, this study has illuminated inherent limitations within the representative election system, ranging from the potential for elite dominance to the intricate balance required between majority rule and the protection of minority rights.

Exploring the perspectives of political theorists, including Rousseau, Aristotle, Marx, and Locke, has further enriched our understanding of the challenges in fully capturing the general will through the electoral process. Each theorist brings unique insights, highlighting issues such as the dominance of privileged elites, unfair struggles, and the trade-offs in sacrificing individual freedoms for collective governance.

A crucial dimension explored in this study is the concept of 'Informational Democracy.' Recognizing the limitations of elections, this concept emphasizes the importance of citizens having equal and unrestricted access to unbiased information. In contrast, restricted information environments can impede citizens' ability to make informed decisions, leading to limitations in the democratic process.

In light of these findings, it is evident that ongoing efforts are essential to address the shortcomings of elections and enhance their capacity to represent citizens' diverse voices and interests genuinely. The pursuit of improved informational Democracy, marked by transparency and unbiased information dissemination, emerges as a critical avenue for refining the democratic process.

As we reflect on the intricate dynamics between governments and citizens, this study opens avenues for future research. Examining the impact of evolving technologies on elections, delving deeper into the role of social media in shaping political discourse, and exploring innovative models of citizen engagement are areas that merit further investigation.

In essence, while elections stand as indispensable pillars of democratic governance, a commitment to continuous refinement and adaptation is vital to ensure that they effectively serve diverse societies' ever-evolving needs and aspirations. The journey toward a more robust and inclusive democratic process requires collective efforts to navigate the complexities unveiled by this study and to chart a course toward more representative and informed governance.

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