Chapter 12

Representations, Elections and Voting
‘If Voting Changed Anything They’d Abolish It’

Title of book by Ken Livingstone (1987)
Representation

• Representation, as a political principle, is a relationship through which an individual or group stands for, or acts on behalf of, a larger body of people.

• Theories of representation
  • Trusteeship
  • Delegation
  • The mandate
  • Resemblance
Trustee Model (全權委託模式)

- A trustee is a person who is vested with formal responsibility for another’s property of affairs.
- 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.
Delegate Model (委任模式)

- A delegate is a person who is chosen to act for another on the basis of clear guidance or instructions. In other words, a delegate is expected to act as a conduit conveying the views of others, while having little or no capacity to exercise his or her own judgement or preferences.

- 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.
Mandate Model (託付模式)

• Both the trustee model and delegate model were developed before the emergence of modern political parties, and therefore view representatives as essentially independent actors.

• Mandate is based on the idea that, in winning an election, a party gains a popular mandate that authorises it to carry out whatever policies or programmes it outlined during the election campaign.
The strength of the mandate doctrine is that it takes account of the undoubted practical importance of party labels and party policies.
Resemblance Model (反應模式)

• The resemblance model suggests that only people who come from a particular group, and have shared the experiences of that group, can fully identify with its interests. This is the difference between ‘putting oneself in the shoes of another’ and having direct and personal experience of what other people go through.
Elections

- The representative process is intrinsically linked to elections and voting.
- Election may not be in themselves be a sufficient condition for political representation, but there is little doubt that they are a necessary condition.
• Which offices or posts are subject to the elective principle?
• Who is entitled to vote, how widely is the franchise drawn?
• How are votes cast?
• Are elections competitive or non-competitive?
Functions of elections

- Recruiting politicians
- Making governments
- Providing representation
- Influencing policy
- Educating voters
- Building legitimacy
- Strengthening elites
Electoral rules and systems vary across the world:

- Voters may be asked to choose between candidates or between parties.
- Voters may either select a single candidate, or vote preferentially, ranking the candidates they wish to support in order.
Cont.

• The electorate may or may not be grouped into electoral units or constituencies.

• Constituencies may return a single member or a number of members.

• The level of support needed to elect a candidate varies from a plurality (the largest single number of votes or a ‘relative’ majority) to an overall or ‘absolute’ majority or a quota of some kind.
Majoritarian system

• 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 system

- 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 in direct proportion to their overall electoral strength, their percentage or seats equalling their percentage of votes.
Commonly used in continental Europe, PR systems are concerned more with the representation of parties than of individual candidates, and may be particularly suitable for divided or plural societies.
What do elections mean?

• They provide the public with its clearest formal opportunity to influence the political process, and also help, directly or indirectly, to determine who will hold government power.

• Public interest: the public interest consists of the general or collective interests of a community: which is good for society as a whole.
Voting Behaviour

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**
  - 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 weaknesses 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.

- In the USA: independents up from 9% (1920) to 30% (1980s); in the UK: 43% (1966) to 16% (1997).
• Sociological Model
  - 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
  - This model shift attention onto the individual and away from socialisation and the behaviour of social groups.
  - 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
  - Radical theories of voting to highlight the degree to which individual choices are shaped by a process of ideological manipulation and control.
  - 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.