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Q2(a)

How has the electoral democracy augmented the participation of people in the democratic process?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- How has the electoral democracy augmented the participation of people in the democratic process?
- Write at 20-mark length

Revision summary

Competitive elections turn subjects into choosers of governments.

Dahl's polyarchy pairs contestation with inclusive participation.

Parties, local bodies, and reservations thicken who takes part between national polls.

Movements and media still orbit the electoral calendar.

Money, exclusion, and thin institutions can reduce the vote to a ceremony.

Introduction

Electoral democracy makes the people choosers of governments through regular, competitive, and inclusive votes. Participation is not only turnout on polling day. It is the wider process that elections organise.

Body

From subject to voter

- Joseph **Schumpeter**'s thin model already treated the vote as the method by which leaders are authorised. Universal adult franchise widened that method beyond property and gender bars.
- **Robert Dahl's polyarchy adds contestation plus participation:** opposition parties, free information, and the right to run for office.
- Once the ballot is secret and counted, rulers must court numbers. That is the first augmentation of popular weight.

How elections thicken participation

- Parties, campaigns, and manifestos teach issues and recruit workers between polls.
- Interest groups, unions, and the press use the electoral cycle to bargain, which **Almond and Verba**'s civic-culture work treated as a participant orientation.
- Federal and local elections, including India's 73rd and 74th Amendment panchayat and municipality polls, multiply offices and bring women and weaker sections onto the roll of representatives through reservations.

- Alternation in office, when it occurs, shows that participation can change governments without a coup.

Beyond the booth

- Social movements time protests to elections. That is still electoral democracy's magnet, not a rival universe.
- New instruments such as postal ballots, voter-education drives, and electronic rolls lower some costs of taking part.

Limits that still bind

- Schumpeterian elitism, money, media capture, and majoritarian pressure can hollow participation even when turnout is high.
- Samuel Huntington's political-order warning is that rapid mobilisation without institutions can strain, not deepen, democracy.
- Electoralism is not the whole of democracy. Rights, courts, and civil society must sit beside the vote, as India's Emergency and later restorations showed.

Net effect

- Compared with colonial subjecthood or one-party acclamation, competitive elections still expand who counts, who is heard, and who can be turned out.

Flow diagram

Universal franchise -> Voters as choosers
Voters as choosers -> Parties campaigns
Parties campaigns -> Local polls reservations
Local polls reservations -> Thicker participation
Money majoritarianism -.limits. -> Thicker participation

Conclusion

Electoral democracy augments participation by turning people into voters, party workers, and local office-holders, and by forcing elites to seek numbers. The augmentation is real. It is incomplete wherever money, exclusion, or weak institutions freeze the process into a ritual.

Facts & figures

Dahl's polyarchy

High contestation plus high inclusiveness as the working standard of modern democracy.

Schumpeter

Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy: democracy as competitive struggle for the people's vote.

73rd and 74th Amendments

Constitutional local elections in India, with reserved seats that widened the pool of representatives.

Almond and Verba

The Civic Culture linked participant orientations to stable democratic process.

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