

# Chapter 1: Electoral Processes and Systems

## 1.1 SUFFRAGE

### (a) Definition and Evolution

Democracy is a universally accepted form of government. An indispensable institution of democracy is election. The most essential requirement of election in a democracy is a suffrage. *Suffrage* or *franchise* is the political right given to the citizen to vote in the elections organized to choose the ruler of his state. The concept and practice of franchise vary from country to country. It has grown from limited franchise to universal adult franchise in most countries.

In the past, the right to elect public officers was restricted. The right to vote and to be voted for was a privilege which was conferred only on rich and noble people. Thus, poor people, slaves and women were not given the right to vote in the past, but as time progressed, people gained political education which made them aware of their rights. Consequently, there were agitation and demands for democratic rule including universal suffrage. As a result of this development, the right to vote ceased to be a privilege for the few. It was then seen as an inalienable right of every adult citizen. It was recently that women were allowed to vote at elections.

### (b) Types of Suffrage

Suffrage can be broadly categorized into two types: limited suffrage and universal adult suffrage.

(i) **Limited Suffrage:** Limited or restricted suffrage is the type in which every citizen is not given the right to vote. In a limited suffrage, adult citizens of a state may be restricted from voting on the basis of property, sex, religion, education, race, etc. If suffrage is on the basis of property (then it is known as property suffrage), a voter must possess a certain minimum amount of property before he is allowed to vote. For example, under the 1922 Constitution of Nigeria, it was stipulated that a voter must possess an annual income of not less than £ 1 00. If suffrage is on the basis of sex, it is usually women that are denied the right to vote. Thus, it is called *adult male suffrage*. For instance, the suffrage in Northern Nigeria during the First Republic was adult male suffrage since only adult males were given the right to vote. Before 1928, women had no right to vote in Britain. A theocratic state can give only those citizens who practise the state religion the right to vote in elections. By such provisions, members of other religious groups would not be given the right to vote. This is called *religious suffrage*. Where suffrage is on the basis of education, only literate citizens are given the right to vote. *Fancy franchise* or *suffrage* is one in which people with certain level of education are given some additional votes on the grounds that they are better informed than others with less education.

Limited suffrage is undemocratic as it denies citizens their inalienable right to vote. But it is observed that today, most countries of the world have abandoned limited suffrage and have embraced universal adult suffrage.

(ii) **Universal Suffrage:** In its literal meaning, universal suffrage is the type in which every citizen of a state is given the right to vote irrespective of social status, age, sex, race, economic status and religious affiliation. But the type of unlimited suffrage does not exist anywhere in the world. At least, suffrage is generally limited by age. Thus what we normally call universal suffrage is, in its right usage, universal adult suffrage. It is called universal suffrage in the sense that every citizen with the ability to reason is given the right to vote. Thus, the democratic electoral system advocates suffrage which excludes people without reasoning capacity. The need for balanced reasoning is justified by the fact that one of the requirements of democracy is rationality i.e. the ability to reason. Democracy demands that, for people to be able to govern themselves properly, they should be able to take rational decisions on all issues affecting them.

### (c) Limitations to Universal Suffrage

There are acceptable democratic limitations to universal suffrage. The underlying assumption is that everybody cannot vote on the ground that, not everybody can exercise the right to vote reasonably. The first limitation is citizenship. Only citizens are generally permitted to vote.

Aliens are not given the right to vote because they do not owe allegiance to their state of sojourn. The second limitation is age. Generally, only adults are given the right to vote. Infants and children are not

permitted to vote and are considered incapable of making right judgments. Some nations adopt a minimum age of 21 years for voters e.g U.S., and Nigeria during the First Republic while some nations adopt a minimum age of 18 years. Nigeria, since the Second Republic, Britain, and the United States of America have accepted the latter age. Thirdly, lunatics are not permitted to vote because they lack reasoning. Fourthly, residential requirement of a minimum of about one year in an area is generally a condition for a person to vote. The residential requirement for enfranchisement is to prevent floating voters who may distort the actual voting pattern of a political community. Literacy, sex, and religious requirements for suffrage are not acceptable because they violate the principle of equality in a democracy.

#### **(d) Franchise**

It is one of the rights of the citizen to take part in elections. The citizen could be a voter or a candidate for elections. There is no one way of determining who gets qualified to vote or to be voted for. The franchise varies from society to society. This right to vote is called franchise and a person who becomes qualified in that system is said to have become *enfranchised*. It is clear from the above that franchise and suffrage mean the same thing: the right to vote in national elections.

#### **(e) Merits of Universal Suffrage**

- (i) It ensures that every citizen participates in the political process. The right to participate in one's government affairs is an inalienable right.
- (ii) Right to vote is the instrument of popular sovereignty. Excluding some people from voting negates the principle of popular sovereignty.
- (iii) The right of every adult citizen to vote ensures political responsibility and public accountability. It ensures that government operates in accordance with the people's will. This, in turn, ensures good and responsible government. Denial of one's right to vote results in neglect of one's interest by the government.
- (iv) Universal suffrage promotes the principle of political equality which is the fundamental principle of democracy. It makes everybody have equal say in his government. It makes the people feel that they are politically equal and can influence government equally.

#### **(f) Demerits of Universal Adult Suffrage**

- (i) The universal adult suffrage is founded on the principle of one man, one vote, but it is argued that giving equal vote to all citizens is unfair as some people are more equal than others. It is argued that the principle of equality is an illusion as people are not equal in real life.
- (ii) It is argued that giving illiterate and ignorant citizens the right to vote is very dangerous as they are considered incapable of informed judgment on public issues. Impaired judgment on the part of voters may result in the election of a bad government. This, in turn, may result in political instability.

## **1.2 ELECTIONS**

Election is the democratic means by which people choose their representatives or rulers. Election allows the people to choose between two or more alternatives. It also allows the people to declare their support for one thing as against the other.

Elections are held in every sphere of life where all the people cannot be directly involved. For instance, elections are held in clubs, churches, schools, etc. to choose officers who coordinate or manage the affairs of such organisations. The procedure for choosing representatives is recognised by the rules of the organisation and those chosen have the authority of the organisation.

For elections to exist, there must be offices to hold, people willing to choose representatives, qualification to take part in voting and rules governing how the- representatives are to be elected. The implication of this is that election has become the main method of choosing representatives, and all organisations have evolved their own systems to ensure a smooth change or choice of office holders.



Figure 1.1: Voters at a polling station

Election is therefore, a process involving definition of eligible candidates, franchise, voting procedure, delimitation of constituency, candidates, and rules of the game.

#### Purpose of Elections

- (i) **Promotion of the Principle of Democracy:** Whenever people think of elections, they link it with the choice of government. It is more than that. Election is one of the major determinants of whether or not a country is democratic. Democracy allows participation of people in their government either directly or indirectly. Elections promote the principle of equality and popular sovereignty. It also gives legitimacy to governments.
- (ii) **Assessment of the Performance of Public Officers:** Through periodic elections, the people are allowed to assess the performance of their representatives and can, in the process change such representatives or reaffirm the support for them. Thus, through elections, the citizens are indirectly expressing their views on public or state matters.
- (iii) **Smooth Change of Government:** An election is also a smooth and orderly way of choosing representatives. If the electoral law is not cumbersome, representatives can be chosen without the fracas associated with mob decisions.
- (iv) **Responsible and Responsive Government:** Through elections, political leaders are made more conscious of their responsibilities to the electorates. They are aware that, at the next elections, they have to give account of their stewardship. It therefore, ensures public accountability. For that reason, politicians are kept on guard because their next tenure depends on their performance now and so, they are made to be more responsive to the aspirations of their people.
- (v) **Ensures Political Education of the People:** Elections also provide the opportunity for political leaders to educate their supporters, brief them on government policies and explain to them the stand of the particular political party or the individual on issues of national importance. The

essence of campaigns is to sell to the electorate the proposed programmes of a political party. For instance, in 1979, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) promised free education at all levels while the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) promised shelter. The electorate were to determine which one was preferred by voting for either the UPN or the NPN. Through this, the electorate were made more aware of the responsibilities of the government.

- (vi) **Promotion of National Integration:** Through elections, integration of the various ethnic groups may become possible. For instance, through elections, people of different backgrounds can interact as party members or as representatives from different parts of a country in a legislature. This provides opportunity for understanding among people of several cultural backgrounds.
- (vii) **Provides Legitimacy for Rulers:** Finally, elections provide legitimacy for the rulers, because through elections, the electorate give their consent to the ruler to rule according to certain promises.

### Processes of Elections

Elections ordinarily involve the choice of persons who are to exercise authority on behalf of the people. The process of choosing representatives varies from place to place, but it generally takes the form of choosing between two or more aspirants.

The first decision in an election involves the determination of who can vote, and for what office. These are often spelt out in the electoral laws of the country e.g. the Electoral Decree of 1977 in Nigeria. Apart from these, the law usually makes provision for the procedure to be followed on the declaration of winners.

The first step in any election is to declare elective offices vacant and to stipulate who can be considered for such offices. For instance, in 1979, in Nigeria, there were offices of the President and the legislators. The constitution stipulates who could vie for these offices and their qualifications. The processes of election include the following:

- (i) **Registration of Voters:** One of the first steps in the arrangements for an election involves registration of voters with a view to compiling the electoral register. The register contains names of prospective voters and candidates. Anyone whose name appears on the voters' register vie for any elective position in his constituency if he or she satisfies the necessary conditions required for such a position. Only the names of qualified citizens are included in the voters' register.
- (ii) **Delimitation of Constituencies:** For ease and smooth representation, countries are divided into smaller regions known as constituencies. The constituencies may be single-member or multi-member. Whichever it is, the constituency is expected to choose an approved number of representatives. For instance, a single-member constituency will return one representative to the legislature while a multi-member constituency will return at least two representatives. Certain factors determine how constituencies are delimited. The most important factor to be considered in constituency delimitation is whether the areas are equal in population. The equality of constituencies must also relate to administrative convenience which the compactness or contiguity of the population will ensure. In addition, consideration must be accorded local political situations and sentiments. Equal electoral districts are hard to carve out, but efforts should be made in that direction if equality of voters is to be ensured.

Certain forces militate against realisation of equal constituencies. Community or local interests may not be homogeneous. In a constituency, there may be several groups with conflicting interests.

Another factor working against ideal constituencies is that administrative boundaries may not coincide with electoral districts. For convenience, electoral districts are not supposed to cut across administrative boundaries since administrative areas are never equal in size or population. For this reason, equality of votes in weight and value may be undermined since votes which a candidate requires to win in a constituency will be higher than the votes required by another. Related to this is the fact that candidates are supposed to be in constant contact with their constituencies and consequently, the constituencies must not be too large to prevent this contact. Population distribution may have altered, decreasing in one area while increasing in another. The equality

which was maintained earlier on would thereby have changed. In that circumstance, there may be constituencies twice as large as others.

For political manipulation, a system called *gerrymandering* may be introduced. This is not a honest error, it is a political device to ensure that the constituency delimitation works in favour of a particular candidate or political party.

To ensure that the delimitation of constituencies is regular and important, most countries have established commissions to review on regular basis of about ten-year interval constituency boundaries to accommodate new demands.

**(iii) Nomination of Candidates:** Having declared vacancies, delimiting constituencies and registering of voters, the manner of nomination, the qualifications of the nominees and nominators, the prescribed forms to complete, etc, are stipulated in the electoral law. A candidate whose candidature does not comply with the electoral law may be disqualified from the elections. In systems where political parties operate, the nominations may be along party lines. For instance, in the 1979 and 1983 elections in Nigeria, political parties nominated candidates for the various elections. If, in a single member constituency, only a candidate has his nomination validated, he is declared a winner provided that the electoral law does not stipulate that he should still go to the polls.

**(iv) Election Campaign:** The procedure for elections is a long, complicated exercise. Candidates are given time to canvass for votes and to sell their ideas to the electorate. The electoral law usually allows a period for campaign during which time questions are asked, promises are made and the candidates have the opportunity of reacting to opponents and allegations. The voters are also educated on voting procedure.

**(v) Voting:** On the election day, all eligible voters are allowed to cast their votes at the polling booths. This is done if their names are on the voters' register for their constituencies. Thus, only registered voters are allowed to vote. At the polling booths, there are officials such as polling officers and polling agents. Polling officers administer the ballot papers and ensure efficient voting. Polling agents represent the interest of their respective candidates in the polling centre. After voting, ballot boxes are taken to the counting centre where the winner is declared by the Returning Officer after the votes have been conducted. In single-member constituencies under a simple majority system, the candidate with the highest number of votes among the contestants is declared the winner.

In a parliamentary system with a representative assembly, the political party with the largest number of victorious candidates forms the government after a general election.

**(vi) Election Petition:** The election results may be challenged in the courts of law or election tribunals set up by law for that purpose. The courts or election tribunals can invalidate an election result in accordance with the Electoral Law. The procedure for election petitions is usually provided by the Electoral Law.

### **Single - Member and Multi - Member Constituencies**

A constituency is a geographical area or an electoral district with a definite population created for the purpose of election of public officers. There are two types of constituencies namely: *single member and multi-member constituencies*. A single-member constituency is one which returns one member to the legislature. It is generally small. A single-member constituency generally operates with simple plurality (simple majority) system. A multimember constituency is one which returns two or more members to the legislature. A multi-member constituency is usually large with its size depending on the number of representatives it is designed to return. Nigeria operates single-member constituencies, while Sweden operates a multi-member system. Germany and Italy also operate multi-member system. Multi-member constituency is always associated with proportional representation. Most countries of the world today operate single-member systems.

#### **(i) Merits of a Single-Member Constituency**

**(a)** A single-member constituency is generally small in size, area and population. Consequently, it is easy for candidates to be well known in their constituencies. It is therefore, more democratic as

voters make better decisions in their choices when candidates in the areas and their population to be covered during election campaigns are relatively small. Thus, a candidate of moderate means has better chances of winning an election than he would have in a multi-member constituency.

- (b) It encourages candidates who are community-based since candidates with local influence and popularity have more chances of victory than they would have in a large multimember constituency. A single-member constituency therefore, taps leadership talents and potentials.
- (c) Since the candidates are well known by the electorate, the system stimulates active interests of the electorate in the election. It also ensures that citizens show interests in what their elected representatives are doing.
- (d) A single-member constituency ensures that the elected representative is in close touch with his constituency. It, therefore, makes for a more responsible and accountable government.
- (e) A single-member constituency is simple to operate. It also guarantees a more stable government than a multi-member system since it ensures a stable majority for the government in the legislature.

#### **(ii) Demerits of a Single-Member Constituency**

- (a) It is argued that it is easier for the government party, powerful groups and wealthy individuals to unduly influence voters in small constituencies than in large constituencies of a multi -member system.
- (b) It creates opportunity for the party in power to use the instrument of its government to 'gerrymander' in the delimitation of constituencies. 'Gerrymandering' is a political strategy, employed in the delimitation of a constituency, in which constituencies are carved in a way that will favour the party in power.
- (c) It could easily lead to the election of parochial representatives whose public actions are controlled by local rather than national interests.
- (d) It may result in the election of a candidate who is not acceptable to the majority of the voters. For instance, in single-member constituencies where four candidates contest an election, the person that would be elected is likely to secure a majority of all the votes cast.
- (e) The system does not favour minorities. It could lead to minorities not being proportionally represented. Where the minorities are scattered all over the nation, they could emerge from an election without a representative. An example is the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) during the 1983 election in Nigeria.

### **1.3 TYPES OF ELECTORAL SYSTEM**

There are several ways of conducting elections but the primary aim is the selection of representatives among qualified members of the community or organisation. Most often, the laws of the country stipulate how elections are carried out. In some constitutions, direct elections are established while in others, it may be indirect elections. Still, in others, it may be a combination of both in which provisions are made for a second ballot in cases of indecisive elections.

#### **Direct Election**

This is an election in which all qualified voters vote for candidates in an election and the outcome of the election is final. Anybody who has the highest number of the votes cast becomes the winner if it is a single-member constituency. But if it is a double-member constituency, the two highest candidates are the winners (if only two representatives are required). This is called direct election because the representative and the electorate relate in such a way that the electorate have the final say in the determination of those who represent or rule them. The candidate accepts responsibilities for the constituency and knows that his future political fortune depends on the electorate.

This type was practised in Nigeria. For instance, in the 1959-79 and 1983 national elections, and the 1987 local government elections.

### **Merits of Direct Election**

- (a) The system is more democratic as all the voters have the supreme political power in the final selection of the candidates of their choice. It fosters the principle of real popular sovereignty.
- (b) It reduces the incidence of corruption since it is more difficult to 'buy' the mass of voters in a direct election than to buy few electors in an indirect election.
- (c) The voters are deemed equal to the extent that all voters have one vote each, and the votes have equal weight or value.
- (d) The elected representative is likely to be much more responsible and accountable to the people who elected him.
- (e) It promotes political education, awareness and consciousness. This is done during campaigns.
- (f) It fosters political participation as every voter takes part in the election of his representative.

### **Demerits of Direct Election**

- (a) Many voters are ignorant of public issues involved in elections. It therefore may not be appropriate to give all voters the power to be involved in the final selection of candidates.
- (b) Where the electorate are dominated by ignorant voters and these are given the ultimate power of the selection of candidates of their choices, this would lead to the election of a bad government. The decision of the ignorant voters at elections is based on sentiments and impulse rather than reasoning. There is a tendency for the resultant government to drift.
- (c) Direct election is more complex and expensive to organize and manage. This is so because it involves all the voters in the nation. This is unlike the indirect election where the electors constitute a very small percentage of the electorate.
- (d) Direct election may result in political tensions, thuggery and destruction of lives and property.

### **Indirect Election**

An election is indirect when the electorate give their right to select their representatives to a group of people previously chosen in an election. In this case, the group called the electors or the electoral college, exercise the right to vote on behalf of the people who elect them. Thus, in an indirect election, there is usually more than one stage for choosing representatives. For instance, the first elections to the Regional Houses of Assemblies and the House of Representatives in Nigeria under the 1951 Constitution were through electoral colleges. The choice of the Nigerian President in 1963 was also through an electoral college. In this type of election, there are primary and secondary stages. At the primary level, the people choose their representatives who will vote on their behalf at the final stage. At the secondary stage, the electoral college choose the people's representatives or rulers. It is the stage of final choice. For instance, the U.S.A. President is elected through indirect election. The election is conducted in stages. The first is the primary election in which the electors are elected by the entire electorate. These electors who are selected in the primary election constitute the electoral college. The electoral college has the ultimate power of electing the President. Election into the reformed Local Government Councils in 1976 in some states of Nigeria were by electoral college. The members of the Constituent Assembly in Nigeria were elected in 1988 through indirect election (electoral college).

### **Merits of Indirect Election**

- (a) The major argument in favour of indirect election is that the election is considered to be more efficient as the chosen electors who make the final selection of the candidates would be more knowledgeable and enlightened than the mass of voters in the direct election. Generally, most of the electorate are ignorant of public issues. Individuals chosen to serve in the electoral college are people who are politically aware and are well informed about public issues. Thus, they can make better choices than the masses.
- (b) The electors in an electoral college would show more sense of responsibility in the choice of candidates than the masses who would often not care about the candidates they vote for.
- (c) Election by the electoral college is more orderly and reduces the incidence of thuggery, riots, arson and other forms of violence.
- (d) Indirect election is more likely to produce a good and effective government than a direct election.

## **Demerits of Indirect Election**

- (a) The most serious weakness of indirect election is that it is considered undemocratic as the entire electorate have no final say in the choice of their leaders. The electors may vote contrary to the wishes of the people, thereby depriving the people of their right to choose their rulers.
- (b) As the electors are few in number as compared with the mass of voters, there are greater opportunities for bribery and corruption since wealthy candidates could use their wealth to buy the electors.
- (c) An indirect election does not generate public interest in public affairs. It does not serve as a viable means of cultivating public spiritedness, unlike a direct election.
- (d) As the indirect election involves primary and secondary elections, it takes longer time to conduct the election.
- (e) The system creates a gap between the electorate and their representatives. It is unrepresentative and anachronistic.

## **The Second Ballot**

The second ballot is an election conducted when there is an indecisive election arising from a tie or where no candidate has scored the required number of votes. The second ballot may take the form of electoral college whereby people chosen by the electorate are empowered to decide on the candidate to be declared the winner. For instance, in France during the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Republic, if no candidate emerged with overall majority in an election, the election is repeated after one week between the two candidates with the highest votes. Under the Nigeria 1979 Constitution, it was provided that after the presidential election, if no candidate was able to secure the highest votes and at the same time got at least 1/4 votes cast in at least two-thirds of all the states of the federation; there would be a second ballot between the two candidates with the highest votes. The 1989 Constitution also provides for this.

The advantage of second ballot is that the election is more thorough, and it ensures that the candidate ultimately elected has the widest support. It seeks to ensure efficient election, provides checks and balances, and is therefore more democratic. However, the disadvantages of second ballot are many. The first is that, it is more expensive to organise. Secondly, it is more protracted and takes time before the result is known. Thirdly, it is prone to producing a state of tension and political instability.

## **Simple Majority**

The simple majority system is better called ***simple plurality system***. This is a system in which the candidate that scores the highest number of votes among the candidates in an election is declared winner. For instance, in an election where there are 4 candidates with the following votes: A, 4,000; B, 4,005; C, 4,010; D, 4,020; D is declared winner under simple plurality because D scored the highest number of votes among the candidates. Candidate D won the election in spite of the fact that he scored less than half of the votes cast. He scored only 4,020 out of a total of 16,035 votes which is about 26% of the total votes cast. This system is practised in Nigeria and Britain. Simple plurality generally operates with a single-member constituency system.

## **Merits**

- (a) The simple plurality system is very simple to operate. It does not involve complex administrative processes.
- (b) It is less expensive to operate as it does not involve a second ballot.
- (c) It generally produces a clear working majority for one party in the legislative assembly. This makes for a strong and stable government.

## **Demerits**

- (a) The simple plurality system, where there are more than two candidate in an election, often produces a candidate who has a plurality and not a majority. In other words, the elected candidate is often supported by a minority of all the voters as shown in the example above where candidates D scored only 4,020 out of 16,035 votes and still won the election. It is therefore, not governed by the democratic principle of majority rule, and to that extent is not democratic.
- (b) The seats won by parties in a legislative assembly may not reflect the voting strength of parties.
- (c) Minority parties are often cheated as they are either underrepresented or not represented at all. An example is the Nigerian Advance Party (NAP) which won no seat throughout the federation

during the 1983 general elections.

### Absolute Majority

Absolute majority is a system in which a candidate for an election is required to score above 50% of the votes cast before he is declared a winner. In other words, the candidate must score at least  $50\% + 1$  votes. Where there are only two candidates in an election, this is very easy to secure. But where there are more than two candidates, it may be difficult to secure. In such a case, there is need for a second ballot which we earlier discussed or an alternative vote.

An alternative vote is a system in which the voter indicates his 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, etc choices among the candidates contesting the election. Under this system, candidates that secure absolute majority in the election by scoring at least  $50\% + 1$  votes in the first choices or preferences are declared elected. For constituencies where no candidate is able to score absolute majority, the candidate with the least number of votes is eliminated and his votes redistributed among other candidates according to preferences shown on them. The process continues until one candidate scores absolute majority.

If the second ballot is used, the candidates that score absolute majority in the first election are declared elected. For constituencies where candidates could not secure absolute majority, a second ballot is conducted, usually a week later. In the second ballot, only the two leading candidates (with the highest votes) in the first election will contest. The other candidates are dropped. Second ballot is practised in France.

#### Merits

- (a) Absolute majority system is designed to ensure that the candidate who wins an election has majority support of the electorate. It is therefore more democratic than the simple plurality (simple majority).
- (b) The system is fair to the candidates and the political parties that contest elections. It seeks to promote active participation of all parties, both large and small in the political processes, since all parties are fairly treated in elections.
- (c) The number of seats won by political parties in the legislative assembly tends to reflect the electoral support of the parties in the nation.

#### Demerits

- (a) The system is rigorous and complex. It is therefore difficult to administer.
- (b) It is also more expensive to operate especially where second ballot is adopted.
- (c) It does not produce quick results. Thus, election results are much delayed. It takes more than a week before election results are released especially where the second ballot is adopted. Where alternative vote is adopted, there are complex calculations which also waste time.
- (d) The system requires voters to be literate, especially where voters have to indicate their preference on the ballot papers.

## 1.4 TYPES OF REPRESENTATION

The idea of representation stems from the fact that everybody cannot be in government, and that some people must be vested with the power to govern others, while recognising that those others must have the ultimate power of choice of those who rule them. The modes of choosing representatives vary from place to place. There are three forms of representation, namely: *geographical*, *functional*, and *proportional* representation.

### Geographical Representation

Geographical representation is a system in which representatives are elected from geographical areas approximately equal in population. The areas are called constituencies or electoral districts. Each constituency returns a candidate in a single-member constituency system, or more than one candidate in a multi-member constituency. Geographical representation requires frequent regular and fair

delimitations or redrawing of constituency boundaries. This is designed to take into account frequent shifts and growth in population. Most countries of the world adopt geographical representation e.g. Nigeria, Britain, U.S.A., U.S.S.R, etc.

### **Advantages**

- (a) Geographical representation is easy and simple to operate. It is not as difficult to operate as the functional or occupational representation. It is easy to delimit an electoral district.
- (b) It makes for better knowledge of the candidates by the electorate as the candidates and the voters live in the same locality.
- (c) The system ensures better responsibility on the part of elected representatives as they would be more committed to the cause and problems of the area from where they are elected.

### **Disadvantages**

- (a) Geographical representation creates opportunity for manipulation of boundaries of constituencies to enable the party in power win more seats than it deserves. This manipulation is called gerrymandering. In such situations, the constituencies may be unnatural in shape or too unequal in population.
- (b) The representative may sacrifice national interests on the altar of local interests. He may not care about national interests in the pursuit of the interest of his electoral area.
- (c) The system of geographical representation in most countries requires a minimum of about one year residence in the electoral district. In such situations, citizens who have not resided in the constituency up to the required minimum period are denied the right to vote or to be voted for.
- (d) It is argued that people do not share common interests just because they live within a district. They are divided by their occupational interests. Thus, if the representative of an area is a medical doctor, it is argued that other functional or occupational groups' interests are not well represented.

### **Functional Representation**

Functional representation is a system in which representative of the people are selected on functional, professional or occupational bases. In this case, representatives are not selected from electoral districts. In functional representation, constituencies are drawn along occupational or functional lines. In this circumstance, all shades of professionals - farmers, teachers, doctors, etc. are represented based on the strength of their population. Functional representation was used in fascist Italy and nazist Germany. As a form of political representation, functional representation is very unpopular and is rarely used in modern times.

### **Advantages**

- (a) The greatest merit of functional representation is that it ensures adequate and fair representation of all interest groups within the nation. Representatives are drawn from all occupational, professional or functional groups and they cater for the interests of their respective groups in the legislative assembly. Thus, all interests in the nation are taken into account in the legislature.
- (b) As representation is based on functional groups and not on local areas (electoral districts), the system promotes national unity. It produces representatives who possess national outlook. The representatives would not be governed or controlled by local or parochial interests as they are not representing local areas but national groups. Thus, they would examine issues from national perspectives.

### **Disadvantages**

- (a) Functional representation is difficult to operate. It is difficult to delimit functional groups to be represented and organise them for representation. It is not easy to determine the group to which citizens belong as a person can belong to two or more occupational groups e.g. a farmer could also be a trader.

- (b) It is equally difficult to allocate the number of representatives to the various functional groups in the nation equitably.
- (c) There could be people without functional groups e.g. students and unemployed persons. In this situation, some people will be without representation, which will be undemocratic.
- (d) Functional representation tends to divide the nation into classes with divergent interests. This does not promote national unity.

### **Proportional Representation**

Proportional representation is a system of allocating seats in the legislature in such a manner that the number of seats won by a political party or group in an election is approximately proportional to the popular votes cast for that party or group at the election. The system ensures that the distribution of seats is strictly according to the electoral strength of political parties. It is adopted by many countries e.g. France. There are two main types of proportional representation namely: *single transferable vote* or *Hare system*, and the *list system*.

In the single transferable vote or Hare system, large constituencies (multi-member constituencies) are created with each constituency returning several representatives. In this system, the voter casts one vote on which he indicates his choices of all candidates in 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc, preference. The voter indicates as many choices as he likes.

But before the counting of votes, the quota is determined. The quota for the election for a constituency is determined by dividing the total number of votes cast by the total number of seats to be filled plus one. The formula for determining quota is: total number of votes cast :- (total number of seats to be filled + 1)

If in a constituency the total votes cast are 126,000 while the total number of seats to be filled is 5, then the quota, for this constituency is  $126,000 \div (5 + 1) = 126,000 \div 6 = 21,000$ . After the counting of votes, candidates who meet the quota are declared elected in the first instance. The surplus votes cast for successful candidates and the votes of the candidates with the least votes are transferred and redistributed to the other candidates based on second choices. The votes are again counted and candidates who attain the quota by the addition of the second choices are declared elected. The surplus votes are further transferred to other candidates according to third choices. The process continues until all the seats allocated for a constituency are filled.

The list system is a system in which political parties prepare lists which are presented to voters who subsequently vote for the lists. In a 'free-list' system, the voter may indicate his preference among his party candidates but in a 'bound' list system, the voter is allowed to indicate preferences among the candidates listed. At the end of the voting, the scores of each party are calculated. The seats are assigned to the parties on the strength of their scores.

### **Advantages**

- (a) Proportional representation is a fairer system of returning candidates to the legislative assembly. It ensures that the strength of parties in the legislative reflects the popular support for the parties in the nation. Minority parties and all interest groups are adequately represented.
- (b) It makes for economy of votes. Votes are not wasted in the system. Each vote is essentially involved in the calculation.
- (c) The system does not give opportunity for gerrymandering which is common in single-member constituencies with simple-plurality systems.
- (d) Proportional representation ensures election of worthy representatives since it requires absolute majority before a candidate is declared elected. Under the system, each party tries to sponsor well-qualified candidates and to promote programmes that can attract votes.
- (e) The system does not call for primary and secondary election which would be more expensive to organise.

### **Disadvantages**

- (a) Proportional representation is cumbersome and complex to operate. It also involves a lot of calculations in computing the results.
- (b) The system requires very literate voters and it would amount to disenfranchisement if it is used in a society with a large number of illiterate voters like in developing nations.

- (c) The system encourages formation of splinter groups and growth of small parties which tend to promote cleavages in the body politics. Proportional representation tends to accentuate and perpetuate minor differences in the society. It emphasises divisive and centrifugal forces in the society. It does not promote national integration.
- (d) Proportional representation, as a result of many political parties which it produced, gives rise to coalition government which lacks solidarity and internal cohesion. It may, therefore, result in a weak and unstable government.

## 1.5 FEATURES OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

A free and fair election is a necessary condition for a democratic government. It produces a legitimate government. The features of free and fair election are as follows:

- (i) **Universal Adult Suffrage:** An indispensable feature of a free and fair election is that all adult citizens are given the right to vote. There is no form of restriction except against lunatics who cannot vote properly. Citizens could exercise their right to vote and to be voted for, or to nominate a candidate.
- (ii) **Revision of Voters' Register:** The voters' register is constantly revised to ensure that all qualified candidates are included in the register. A voters' register that excludes some qualified citizens from voting in the election does not foster free and fair election. Voters' register should be well compiled and displayed to the electorate for their inspection and to enable them raise valid objections. The electoral law should also be periodically reviewed to ensure that it keeps pace with changing situations.
- (iii) **Fair Delimitation of Constituencies:** The country must be divided into approximately equal constituencies so that the electorates are fairly represented. Equal constituencies should return equal number of representatives.
- (iv) **The Existence of Choice of Candidates:** The electorate should be presented with alternative choice of candidates. In a situation where there are no choice of candidates, the election is not free and fair.
- (v) **Secret Ballot:** Voting at elections should be by secret ballot. This enables the voters to vote for any candidate of his choice without any fear of molestation or victimisation. Public voting is undemocratic as it does not allow voters to express their real minds.
- (vi) **Equality of Votes:** The vote cast by different voters should be equal in value. Free and fair election also demands the principle of 'one-man, one vote'.
- (vii) **Candidates' Freedom of Campaign:** Candidates should exercise the right of free movement. There should be equal opportunity to move freely and sell their programmes to the electorate.
- (viii) **Impartial Law Enforcement Officers:** Law enforcement officers should be impartial. They should give equal treatment to all the candidates and political parties involved in the election. There should be no intimidation of any candidate or voters.
- (ix) **Independent and Impartial Electoral Commission:** There should be in existence an independent electoral commission established by the constitution. The commission should be free from government intervention in the conduct of elections. The electoral commission should be impartial and should also inspire the confidence of the people.
- (x) **Public Counting and Declaration of Results:** The counting of votes after elections should be done publicly and in the presence of candidates or their representatives. Election results must be declared publicly immediately after counting.
- (xi) **Opportunity for Petition:** The electoral law must provide opportunity for candidates who are not satisfied with the conduct and the result of elections to challenge them in a law court. There should also be provision for appeals against lower court decisions.
- (xii) **Regular Elections:** Elections should be held at periodic and regular intervals. The periodic intervals vary from country to country. However, a four-or five-year interval is a normal period for elections.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979 provided for four-yearly elections for the Presidency, National Assembly, Governorship and State Assemblies.

**(xiii) Observance of the Electoral Law:** There should be an electoral law which governs the conduct of the election. This should be made by representatives of the people. The election law (rule of the game) should be strictly and impartially enforced. It should be strictly observed by the electorate, the candidates, political parties, the law enforcement officers, the electoral officials, and the press. No one should break any of the regulations governing the conduct of the election. No candidate should employ any means which could give him any advantage over his rivals. Candidates and their supporters should also accept the verdict of the people.

## 1.6 PROBLEMS INHIBITING FREE AND FAIR ELECTION

Most of the problems encountered in the processes of election are related to the nature of our society. Elections, in the modern sense, have come to mean a winner-take-all affair. Consequently, people are most unwilling to 1000e elections. Apart from this, the modern processes of elections are alien to our society.

Related to this is the diverse nature of our society. There are several ethnic groups to which people are strongly attached. Each group wants to rule and this can only be done if they win elections. For this reason, they have little regards for the rules of the game. The nature of leadership is also a major hindrance to free and fair elections. Nobody, having been in power, wants to be ousted. They therefore resort to the use of all sorts of election malpractices to stay in power. Such manipulations include appointment of an electoral commission favourable to the government, adulteration of electoral register, use of political thugs or law enforcement agents to scare away supporters of opponents, distortion of election results, etc. Often external influence such as interference by former colonial powers in an election to install a favoured candidate in government may hinder free and fair elections.

The level of our development is also a major hindrance to free and fair election. Often people see public position as a ticket to quick wealth. In addition, because we are not well-developed, we tend to encourage corruption by making demands from candidates before we vote for them, thereby selling our votes. Most voters are not educated and can therefore, be manipulated to vote according to whims and caprices of few literate and wealthy citizens.

In our country, most political parties were tribal parties, and therefore had a tendency to invoke tribal sentiments as against merit. Often political parties win elections in their tribal base thereby depriving people of the right calibre of candidates. Furthermore, candidates are nominated by political parties thereby preventing non-party candidates from participating on equal basis with the party-supported candidates.

Another problem inhibiting free and fair election is non-voting. This arises from political apathy and lack of political awareness and consciousness. There is also the problem of illiteracy in developing nations. The result of this is that voter find it difficult to vote properly as they are unable to properly understand the voting procedure. Moreover, they are unable to make rational decisions as most of them are unaware of the issues involved in the election. There is also the problem of violence in elections. Often there is thuggery and intimidation. Party system tends to work against free and fair elections as political parties nominate and sponsor candidates on the basis of party loyalty and not on the basis of competence and qualities of individuals. Competent persons who do not belong to political parties are not nominated.

## 1.7 THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

### Status

As an insurance for free and fair election, the electoral laws of a country provide for the establishment of an electoral commission which must be independent of government. It is generally established by the constitution to guarantee its autonomy. The functions of the electoral commission must be clearly stated in the electoral law while men of proven integrity must conduct the elections. In addition, one of the essential characteristics of an electoral commission is that it must be free of political party control or influence. Its members must be politically neutral. Apart from this, members must enjoy security of

tenure while their salaries must be charged to the consolidated fund. In Nigeria, it was called the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) during the Second Republic in 1978, while the one for the Third Republic which was set up in 1987 was known as the National Electoral Commission (N.E.C.).

In December 1995, the military government of General Sani Abacha, which earlier dissolved NEC in 1993, established the National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (NECON). In 1998, General Abdusalam Abubakar's Administration dissolved NECON and established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) which is still in existence till today. INEC organised all transitional elections that ushered in the INEC organised all transitional elections that ushered in the Fourth Republic on May 29, 1999.

### **Functions of the Electoral Commission**

The primary function of the electoral commission is to organise and conduct elections. This responsibility is discussed in details as follows:

- (i) The electoral commission organises and supervises all elections. It establishes and equips polling stations. It recruits, trains and deploys election officials. It also procures and distributes electoral materials and equipment. It declares election results.
- (ii) The electoral commission screens and registers nominated candidates for election. It ensures that the candidates satisfy all the requirements necessary for contesting the election.
- (iii) It is the responsibility of the electoral commission to register the voters. It prepares and maintains the voters' register for the purpose of elections. It ensures that the voters' register is constantly and regularly revised to ensure that all qualified voters are contained in the list during each election.
- (iv) The commission delimits the country into constituencies or electoral districts. In doing this, it takes into account the provision of the constitution and the electoral law.
- (v) It is the responsibility of the electoral commission to educate voters on election procedures, the place and time of election and the need for them to vote. This involves public education through magazines, newspapers, radio, television, film shows and posters. This public education on how to vote continues on the election day when election officials direct voters on how to cast their votes.
- (vi) The electoral commission acts as respondents in election petition. It prepares and assembles evidence for its defence and justification for its action in declaring a particular candidate victorious.
- (vii) In some countries like Nigeria, the electoral commission has an additional function of registering political parties under the provision of the constitution and the electoral law. It determines the eligibility of political parties to sponsor candidates for election. It disburses fund to political parties, ensures that their accounts are annually audited, and controls political parties to ensure that they strictly conform to the provisions of the constitution and electoral law.
- (viii) The electoral commission formulates electoral policies and advises on the modifications and amendments of electoral laws whenever it considers such desirable.

### **Problems of the Electoral Commission**

The worst problem of the electoral commission is government interference in its functions. Most often, the commission acts with government agents to carry out its functions. These agents include, for instance, the police. The loyalty of these agents are often in doubt. Furthermore, members of the commission are appointed by the government of the day and therefore, tend to be subservient to the government. For the commission to work effectively, it requires funds which can only be provided by the government. The commission also relies on government media to carry through its functions and these media are often owned by government. Thus, the greatest problem facing the electoral commission is how it can discharge its duties with autonomy and impartiality. The creation of INEC as a permanent body has actually minimised these problems.

### **Organisation of the Commission**

The electoral commission is composed of a chairman, a secretary and electoral commissioners. The officials of the commission include electoral officers, returning officers, supervisory presiding officers,

poll clerks, polling orderlies, and counting clerks. These officials are appointed for special purposes.

The chairman and his commissioners are responsible for the elections. They formulate policies to that effect and supervise elections throughout the country. They also answer questions in respect of the conduct of the elections, including the results.

The secretary maintains the secretariat of the commission, controls personnel and ensures that all electoral regulations are observed in the appointment and conduct of all supporting officers. He is responsible to the chairman. Electoral officers are appointed for each election. They distribute materials to polling officers and supervise the conduct of elections in their areas. They are in charge of the conducts in polling centres ensuring that the ballot boxes, voters' cards and the conduct of the election are without hitch. The returning officer counts the votes cast and pronounces results.

The polling orderlies supervise the actual casting of votes at polling stations to ensure that voters are allowed to vote without molestation. Party agents at the polling station ensure that the interest of their respective political parties are not jeopardised.

## KEY POINTS

### 1. Suffrage is the political right of the citizen to vote.

#### Merits of Universal Adult Suffrage

- (i) It ensures mass participation in the political parties.
- (ii) It promotes the principle of popular sovereignty.
- (iii) It ensures political responsibility and public accountability,
- (iv) It promotes the principle of political equality.

#### Demerits of Universal Adult Suffrage

- (i) Equality in voting is illusory as people are not equal to reality.
- (ii) It is argued that, giving illiterate and ignorant masses the right to vote is dangerous to the political system.

### 2. Election: An election is a democratic means by which people choose their political leaders

#### Purposes of Election

- (i) It promotes principles of democracy,
- (ii) It gives legitimacy to a government.

- (iii) It can be used to assess the performance of public officers.
- (iv) It ensures smooth change of government.
- (v) Election tends to secure responsible and responsive government.
- (vi) Political education is given to the people during election.'
- (vii) It gives effect to national integration.

### **Processes of Election**

The processes of an election involve:

- (i) Registration of voters;
- (ii) Delimitation of constituencies;
- (iii) Nomination of candidates;
- (iv) Election campaigns;
- (v) Voting; and
- (vi) Counting of votes and declaring of results.

### **Single-Member and Multi-Member Constituencies**

- (i) Advantages of Single-Member Constituencies
  - (a) Voters have better knowledge of their candidates, which makes for better choice.
  - (b) It encourages candidates who are community based.
  - (c) It stimulates active interest of the electorate in the election.
  - (d) It ensures that the elected representatives are in close touch with their constituents.

(e) It is simple to operate.

(f) It guarantees a strong stable government.

#### (ii) Disadvantages of Single-Member Constituencies

(a) It is easy for the government party to unduly influence voters in small constituencies.

(b) It creates opportunity for gerrymandering.

(c) It could lead to election of parochial individuals.

(d) It may lead to election of minority-supported candidates.

(e) The system is not fair to small parties.

### 3. Types of Electoral System

**Direct election:** This is one in which qualified voters choose the candidates once and for all.

**Indirect Election:** This is the system in which there are primary and secondary elections, the secondary election being done by an electoral college.

**Simple Ballot:** This is an election conducted when there is a clear winner in the first ballot.

**System Majority:** This is known as simple plurality. This is a system whereby the candidate that scores the highest votes is elected.

**Absolute majority:** Absolute majority is a system in which candidates must score about 50% of all votes cast before they are declared elected.

### 4. Types of Representation

**Geographical Representation:** This is a system in which representatives are elected from geographical areas which are carved in approximately equal sizes.

**Functional Representation:** This is a system in which people are represented on the basis of functional or occupational groupings.

**Proportional Representation:** This is a system of allocating seats in the legislature in such a way that the number of seats won by a party is in proportion to the popular votes cast for the party.

### **Advantages of Proportional Representation**

- (a) It is a fairer system of returning candidates.
- (b) It makes for economy of votes.
- (c) It does not give opportunity for gerrymandering
- (d) It ensures better quality of representatives.
- (e) There is no need for a second election.

### **Disadvantages of Proportional Representation**

- (a) The system is cumbersome and complex, therefore, it is difficult to administer.
- (b) It is suitable for illiterate voters.
- (c) It encourages formation of small parties and splinter groups.
- (d) It may give rise to a coalition government which produces weak and unstable government.

## **5. Features of Free and Fair Elections**

- (i) There should be universal adult suffrage.
- (ii) The voters register should be revised regularly.
- (iii) Constituencies should be fairly delimited.
- (iv) The electorate should be provided with alternative choice of candidates in an election,
- (v) The voting must be by secret ballot,
- (vi) There should be equality of votes for all voters.
- (vii) The candidates should have the right to campaign freely.

- (viii) Law enforcement officers should be impartial.
  - (ix) There should be independence and impartiality of the electoral commission
  - (x) There should be public counting of votes and declaration of results,
  - (xi) There should be strict observance of the electoral law.
- Problems Inhibiting Free and Fair Elections in Nigeria**
- (i) Ethnicism and sectionalism.
  - (ii) Lust for power makes people violate electoral regulations in order to win.
  - (iii) Money is used to influence voters during elections.
  - (iv) Illiterate and ignorant voters do not vote properly,
  - (v) There is the factor of non-voting and political apathy,
  - (vi) Sometimes, single plurality system does not produce fair results.

#### **Electoral Commission**

#### **Functions**

- (i) It organizes and supervises elections.
- (ii) It screens and registers nominated candidates.
- (iii) It compiles voters' registers.
- (iv) It delimits constituencies.
- (v) It educates voters on voting procedure.
- (vi) It acts as respondents in election petitions.

(vii) In countries like Nigeria, it registers and controls political parties,

(viii) It advises on the amendment of electoral laws.

## SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

### Essay Questions

1. Discuss the purpose of elections in a state.
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a single-member constituency?
3. What is proportional representation? Discuss the arguments for and against it.
4. What are the features of a free and fair election?
5. Write short notes on:
  - (a) Franchise
  - (b) Electoral college
  - (c) Simple majority
  - (d) Absolute majority
6. What are the status, functions and problems of the Electoral Commission?

### Objective Questions

1. Gerrymandering is commonly found in

A. Single-member constituency.

B. suffrage.

C. simple majority system.

D. multi-member constituency.

E. electoral college.

2. In an absolute majority system, the elected candidate is always one who scores

A. the most votes among the candidates for the election.

B. the highest votes among the candidates for an election.

C. more than 50% of all votes cast in the election.

D. two-thirds of all the votes cast in the election.

E. the simple plurality.

3. The right of a citizen to vote in national elections is called

A. Franchise.

B. universal suffrage.

C. simple majority.

D. simple plurality.

E. second ballot.

4. Electoral college is a,

A. college for electors.

B. college for legislators.

C. college for councilors.

D. body of electors who had been elected.

E. body of persons elected to choose political leaders.

5. The strategy of manipulating constituencies to favour the ruling party is called

A. franchise.

B. gerrymandering.'

C. multi-member constituency

D. single-member constituency.

E. suffrage.

#### Answers

1. A

2. C

3. A

4. E

5. B