Elements of electoral democracy

Elements of electoral democracy are the principles and practices that ensure free and fair elections, as well as the participation and representation of citizens in the political system. Electoral democracy can be seen as a component of liberal democracy, which also includes the protection of human rights, the rule of law, and the separation of powers.

The main elements of electoral democracy are:

1. Universal suffrage:

This means that every adult citizen has the right to vote and to be elected, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or any other factor that could discriminate them. For example, in South Africa, universal suffrage was achieved in 1994, after the end of apartheid, which had denied the vote to the majority of the population based on their race.

2. Secret ballot:

This means that voters can cast their votes without fear of intimidation, coercion, or reprisal, and that their choices are not revealed to anyone else. For example, in Afghanistan, secret ballot was introduced in 2004, after decades of war and instability, to protect the voters from violence and pressure from armed groups or warlords.

3. Competitive multiparty system:

This means that there are multiple political parties or candidates that offer different policy alternatives and compete for the voters' support. For example, in India, there are more than 2,000 registered political parties and hundreds of candidates that contest in national and state elections, reflecting the diversity and pluralism of the society.

4. Periodic elections:

This means that elections are held regularly and at fixed intervals, so that the elected officials are accountable to the people and can be replaced if they fail to meet their expectations. For example, in Brazil, elections are held every four years for the president, the congress, and the governors, and every two years for the mayors and the municipal councils.

5. Independent electoral management body:

This means that there is an impartial and professional institution that organizes and supervises the electoral process, ensuring its integrity and transparency. For example, in Ghana, there is an independent Electoral Commission that is responsible for conducting and overseeing all public elections and referenda, as well as registering voters and political parties.

6. Electoral system:

This means that there is a set of rules that determine how the votes are translated into seats in the legislature or other representative bodies. For example, in Germany, there is a mixed-member proportional system that combines single-member districts with proportional representation, aiming to balance geographic representation with proportionality.

7. Electoral integrity:

This means that there are mechanisms to prevent and address any irregularities, fraud, or malpractice that could affect the outcome or legitimacy of the elections. For example, in Kenya, there is an independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission that has established a biometric voter registration system and an electronic results transmission system to enhance the credibility and security of the elections.

Electoral democracy is not only about holding elections, but also about creating a conducive environment for democratic participation and representation. This requires respect for civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression, association, and assembly, as well as access to information and media. It also requires effective and inclusive institutions, such as political parties, civil society organizations, and interest groups, that can articulate and aggregate the interests and preferences of the people. Moreover, it requires a culture of democracy, where citizens are aware of their rights and responsibilities, and where they trust and respect each other and the democratic process.