

Course Name- B.A.L.L.B. IVth Sem.

Subject- Political Science

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Topic Political Participation

Political Participation

Allowing citizens to have their voices heard is very important. Political participation is when people get involved with the way in which their country is governed. It helps governments understand what it is that people want, and allows the people to make sure the government are fulfilling their role. Whether it be through voting, campaigning, or running in an election, there are many ways to make sure your voice is heard.

WHY IS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?

Political participation is one of the best ways for ordinary people to make a substantial change to their community. If people are engaged with the politics of their country, they will better understand where the government is going wrong. Once they have an understanding of the political problems, they will be better equipped to combat them. If this political understanding then becomes political action, the government will have a clearer understanding of why people are unhappy. If everyone in a country participates in politics, it will become much harder for a government to ignore the problems of the people. Therefore, an increase in political participation, should mean more will be done to address political and social problems.

WHY PARTICIPATE?

There are a number of ways to participate in politics. Almost everyone will be able to make use of at least one of these ways. Some are easier than others;

Voting

This is the easiest and most important form of political participation. Voting makes sure that the politicians that are elected, are the politicians that citizens want. Every adult has the right to vote. This is a very important right as it allows you to

decide who governs your country. This could affect many areas of your life including access to health care, education, and employment. It is therefore very important that you make sure you have your say.

Campaigning

If there is a particular issue or problem that you see, you can campaign. This raises awareness of the issue which means that other citizens will understand it better. It also brings it to the attention of the government and holds them to account. Forms of campaigning include peaceful protesting, writing letters to officials, or joining an activist or interest group. If you continuously campaign about an issue, this increases the chances of that issue being addressed by the government.

Understanding

A simple way to become involved with politics, is simply to understand who the political parties are in your country and what you think of them. This makes it easier to decide who to vote for. It also makes it easier to understand what political problems a country has, and how they could be fixed. Finding information on political parties is therefore a very good starting point. Information can be found by reading the agendas or manifestos of a party to see what their policies are. These can normally be found online. It is also helpful to read the news, from a number of different sources. This gives a wide understanding of political issues and key political figures.

Discussion

Talking about politics with your family, friends, and neighbours is an easy and fun way to engage with your country's political system. This helps you develop your own political views by listening to what other people have to say. It's great to have an opinion on a political issue, but also very important that you're prepared to listen to what others think. By listening to other

opinions you get to see things from another point of view which might change how you feel.

Hold a public position

One of the best way to become involved with politics, is to become a politician or public official. If you hold a public or political position, you have power to find out what problems your community has. You also have power to help to have these issues addressed.

Factors of Political Participation

The nine factors influencing political participation are as follows:

1. Psychological or cognitive traits 2. Social environment 3. Political environment 4. Level of modernization and urbanization 5. Political socialization 6. Modes of participation 7. Voting 8. Campaign activities 9. Co-operative activity.

Political participation is normally associated with the modern form of democracy. In this political system, participation by the individual in political activity is considered a virtue, a sign of political health and the best method of ensuring one's private interests. Participation gives an opportunity to express one's own point of view and secure the greatest good for the greatest number.

It provides citizens a sense of dignity and value, alerts both the rulers and the ruled to their duties and responsibilities and

facilitates broader political understanding. By involving people in the affairs of the state, participation promotes stability and order in the system. It not only stimulates political learning but also makes citizens responsible. It deepens the political awareness and increases the sense of political effectiveness.

Taking part in the political processes which lead to the selection of political leaders or determine or influence public policy is generally known as political participation. Despite the fact that elections are the major event in the political process, political participation cannot be limited to only electoral process, i.e., voting and campaigning.

It is a term applied to various types of activities ranging from political orientations, attitude, knowledge, interest in politics, identification with a political unit (political party or its any wing) to taking active part in political action such as rally, demonstration, strike or campaigning for voting in elections. The most important political activities may be those carried out by parties or citizens between elections to influence government decisions about specific problems that concern them.

In brief, political participation refers to all those activities which influence the decision-making process. These activities may include voting, seeking information, discussing, attending public meetings, making financial contribution, communicating with representatives to become member in a political party, canvassing, speech writing, delivering speech, working in campaigns, competing for public and party offices, etc.

There is no consensus among scholars whether to include in its definition illegal as well as legal activity, unsuccessful and successful attempts of influence and involuntary as well as voluntary action. Huntington and Nelson (1976) have argued that voluntary (autonomous) and manipulated (mobilized) participation are not clearly distinguished categories.

Myron Weiner (1962) restricts his definition to voluntary action—the activity which is designed by the actor himself to influence governmental decision-making. When we define political behaviour in such broad terms as any form of (individual or collective) involvement in the political process, or any activity which has political consequences in relation to government and policy, then naturally both legitimate forms of political participation (such as voting in elections, activism in interest groups, or social movements) and illegitimate political activities (including terrorism, revolutions and coups d'état) come under its purview.

Factors Influencing Political Participation:

Political participation is a complex phenomenon. It depends upon a variety of factors that influence it.

These factors can be described as under:

1. Psychological or cognitive traits:

Social psychologists have emphasized on psychological traits which stem from individual personality and cognitive structures. They include sense of efficacy, sense of civic responsibility, sociability, sense of alienation and authoritarianism.

It is assumed that there is a relation between the cognitive status of low self-esteem and feeling of pessimism and alienation from society and political apathy. But this political apathy influences political participation it is not much clear and certain.

2. Social environment:

The social environment definitely has an impact on political participation. Social environment includes elements like education, occupation, income, age sex, race, caste, ethnicity, mobility and habitation. The more educated are better able to transmit their political interest and knowledge to their children and to the people of their neighbourhood.

In this respect, educational institutions serve as the basic ground in the development of articulateness and skills of political participation through schools/college/university unions. One learns here to join in an organization, fulfil duties, participate in meetings, discuss social issues and organize to achieve group goals.

3. Political environment:

To what extent an individual receives political stimuli to participate in political activities, depends on the political environment or the political setting in which he/she finds himself/herself. The right to participate is a defining feature of democratic political systems but is not fully exercised. Levels of political interest and apathy have often been taken as criteria of

participation and non-participation, including party membership, expressed interest in politics and awareness of issues.

Political parties also have an important role to play in political participation. This role is partly expressive and partly instrumental. The party inspires in its members a feeling of belongingness. It acts as a powerful reference group in its own right.

As a part of its instrumental functions, the party contacts and registers voters, selects party nominees, organizes campaign activities, mobilizes rallies to influence the electorate during elections to vote and at other occasions to favour their programmes.

The campaign and rally have their effects on polarizing party attachments and reinforcing candidate preferences. A significant aspect of the relation of the individual to his/her political environment is his/her exposure to the influence of propaganda.

4. Level of modernization and urbanization:

It has been argued that there is a positive correlation between these two processes and the political participation. Both the processes help in increasing the extent of political communication which leads to greater political awareness.

Urbanization as the first stage of the modernization process tends to raise literacy; increased literacy tends to increase the media exposure; and increasing media exposure facilitates

wider political participation. Economic modernization affects political participation through socio-economic status.

High socio-economic status is conducive for an increase in the overall amount of political participation. Modernization not only tends to increase class-based participation but also decrease communal-based participation. A majority of lower-class persons generally vote for the left parties while the majority of the upper and middle class persons vote for the rightist parties.

5. Political socialization:

Socialization is the mechanism by which people become aware about the issues and ideology and come to identify with a particular political party. It affects both the quality and amount of participation. The politically aware are usually better able to relate their social values to their political opinions, to achieve stable, internally consistent belief systems.

6. Modes of participation:

There are varieties of ways in which people can participate in the political processes of a society. Some are directly associated with the electoral sub-system and some are with other political activities. Activities like voting, campaigning, etc., are some of the important modes of participation.

7. Voting:

Voting is the most frequent citizen activity, especially in modern democracies. The scope and the outcome of voting is very broad affecting all the members of a society. Voting determines the leadership issues and policies of the party as well as the whole nation. The major criterion remains voting in elections

which is consistently somewhat higher than the other measures.

8. Campaign activities:

Participation in election campaign or other campaigns is another mode of political participation. Through this leaders can increase their influence over the citizens and the voter turnout. Campaign activity also produces collective outcomes.

9. Co-operative activity:

People can also participate outside the electoral process—voting and election campaign. They can take part in groups or organizational activity to deal with social and political problems. In such activities they join hands with other people of the society to influence the actions of the government. The outcome of such a participation results in collective gain.

