

CONCEPT AND PURPOSE OF ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT : Electoral Geography is essentially concerned with the study of the processes of political decision-making as the study of the spatial and environmental perceptions of such decision-makers. It is not limited only to the depiction of areal distribution of Votes, but the field is equally important in respect of the other spatial aspects of political behaviour and manifestations through the outcome of such elections. Geographical analysis of elections stands, therefore, as the key element in understanding the governmental allocations of various spatial activities. The radical/relevance revolution in geography has also claimed that much of the contemporary human geography is political geography and all studies related to spatial organization of society must be concerned directly or indirectly with the processing of the government, local, state or at central level because such authorities are the determinants of who gets what, where and how, the central theme of all welfare oriented geographical research. Since electoral battle is the first step in the formation and processing of the government, the geographical analysis of elections and plebiscites becomes the core concept of all geographical studies.

The purpose of this study is to identify the geography of voting itself, to analyze the geographical influences on voting and to find out the geographical influences on the representation.

INTRODUCTION

The growing consensus towards the studies of voting behaviour in the western countries as well as in ours seems to be a subject of particular and peculiar fascination for the political geographers. The electoral processes and practices are becoming the focus of extensive research and during last two decades valuable works have been published and are being carried out by geographers here and abroad. This expansion of the scope of the subject has thus gone to a real revolution searching not only for a perfect methodology and scientific approach but for a concrete concept and purpose. A tremendous amount of electoral statistics are available almost in every political system which can be processed and winnowed through the use of computers and quantitative techniques of analysis. But the geographer should take care to throw light on broad ecological and social factors and patterns.

Since electoral processes involve individual and collective decisions affecting directly political and social fabrics and open-up channels of interactions between the political and social systems, between elites and the masses, between the individual and his government should be studied from the point of view of both macro and micro political analysis. Such studies should be based on a variety of methodological and theoretical approaches using historical, psychological, sociological, political, statistical and other methodologies and both normative and empirical theory. The electoral studies may range from individual and localized cases to comparative studies both at national and international levels.

CONCEPT

Election is not a new concept, but has been related to the human culture, the

history and the political ideology. The past history of human culture reveals the fact that even the primitive people very frequently used elections to select the head of their group and territory. The emergence of the present democratic types of government all over the world has eventually changed the old political philosophy, the political culture and the political ideologies and has generated a new constitutional concept of elections around which the present human society has been organized. In all democratic countries with multi-party political systems, the electoral battle is the first step in the process of coming to power. Looked at from this perspective the geography of elections would form the first stage in the study of the geography of politics in all modern democracies. Now the elections and the electoral politics is becoming more and more effective geographic agent to reshape and re-organize the spatial pattern - electoral districts or constituencies to which welfare oriented geographical researches cannot only be organized but can prove very much valuable, effective and fruitful and can also place the subfield within the central concept of new geography to study the quality of life.

PURPOSE

The purpose of electoral geography is to provide the opportunities to study a political system in action, since during an election a political system is put on a thorough display and is defined by the regulating function of the society. The political system in a way thus represents that pattern of human interaction wherein power and authority are generated, allocated, influenced and changed the pattern whereby society is organized, whether that organization is formal or informal, differentiated or undifferentiated. Every political system forms its own functional region or geographical area where several processes are found being operated through political institutions and political

parties. Elections are therefore broadly considered complicated political processes and provide broader scope to analyse the social system within a framework of political system. An election itself is a formal act of collective decisions that occurs in a stream of connected antecedent and subsequent behaviour. It is not a single event, some of great significance some more trivial.

The paradigm of electoral studies in political geography not only integrates the sub-field of study into the main discipline but also opened-up possibilities of interdisciplinary communication with other social sciences like political science, sociology, anthropology and economics enabling the exchange of concepts, tools and techniques with them. Electoral geography thus provides a new perspective in the field of geography to study and analyse the spatial aspects of political participation at various levels of authority from local to central and stands as the key element in understanding the roles of governments as spatial allocators. The nature of government - the spatial bases of support to the ruling party is chief determinant in the 'where' part of the central question 'who gets what and where?' to which modern geographers in increasing numbers are addressing themselves. Electoral studies have added new dimensions to the field of geography and it has benefitted the main field through a deeper understanding of the processes and patterns underlying human behaviour in space.

Electoral geography is now one of the main sources of fresh insights into the general field of human spatial behaviour. Yet until recently it has been a neglected aspect of our discipline. However, it is being realized that geography is profoundly affected by governments, since the government at present is the most effective geographical agent responsible for the location of various phenomena. The governments in the most of the states all over the world

are processed through elections. Furthermore with the development of political unawareness in the discipline and the rapid growth of the behaviouralist theme, geographers have realized that their emphasis on spatial locations, distribution and inter-relationships is particularly well suited to studies of the spatial organization of representative areas, the process of political informations, diffusion and electoral choice and the spatial structure of the behavioural patterns which result. Geographers have long been concerned analysing the spatial pattern of various activities and have focussed their attention on the spatial distribution of phenomena and the processes by which these are generated with spatial organization of society. Electoral geography presupposes therefore one of the main stream of the discipline most relevant to the current socio-economic and politico-geographical issues.

Spatial organizations reveal a number of political patterns and processes generating regional and sectorial policies, voting-patterns political organization, political environment controversies and such several other issues of which forms of representation is of greater concern to political geographers because it has direct bearing on the processes, policies, planning and finally on every manifestation of development of the landscape. The spatial organization of society to which the geographers have long been concerned comprises two elements the natural reflection of society in spatial pattern - the defacto organization, and the set of spatial patterns explicitly defined for administrative purposes - the dejure organization. The pattern of social areas or neighbourhoods in a city is an example of defacto organization whereas that of parliamentary constituencies or congressional districts exemplified that of dejure organization. Given this general definition of the geographer's sphere of influence we can identify the many geographical elements in a typical election. The analysis of the spatial pattern of voting

behaviour may provide clue to spatial processes and researches along these lines would seem to be most fruitful directions of process. The main task of electoral geography, therefore, is to see and analyse the patterns of votes cast in an election and plebiscites and also to examine why such patterns have emerged.

CONCLUSION

The concept and purpose of electoral geography has thus brought the geographers to open and foresee a new direction in the

field of political geography, furthermore the rise of political consensus in the discipline has led the geographers nearer to the decision makers to examine and evaluate why such decisions have been taken and what impact these decisions are to bring on spatial locations, distribution and their inter-relationships. This new paradigm for the study of electoral geography calls attention to the broader dimensions of electoral processes and patterns to orient the discipline towards a welfare approach on the lines of radical/relevance revolution.

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