



## 10<sup>th</sup> – POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties are one of the most visible institutions in a democracy. For the ordinary citizens, democracy is equal to political parties. Thus, it is important to know the nature and working of political parties.

**Meaning of Political Parties:** A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government. All political parties have some policies and programmes for the society with a view to promote the collective good. They try to persuade people why their policies are better than others. They seek to implement their policies by winning popular support through elections. Political parties reflect fundamental political divisions in a society. All the parties favour certain part of the society and that's why they involve partisanship. A party is known by which part it stands for, which policies it supports and whose interests it upholds.

A political party has following three components

The leaders

The active members

The followers

**Partisanship:** A tendency to take a side and inability to take a balanced view on an issue. A person who is strongly committed to a party, group or faction is called partisan.

**Function of Political Parties:**

1. Candidates are put forward by political parties to contest elections. These candidates may be chosen by the top leaders or by members of the party. In some countries like USA, members and supporters of a party choose its candidate.
2. Parties put forward their policies and programmes for voters to choose from them. A government is expected to base its policies on the line taken by the ruling party (Political party that runs government).
3. Political parties play a major role in making laws for the country. No law can become a bill unless majority parties support it.
4. Political parties form and run governments. The big policy decision taken by political executive comes from the political parties.
5. Parties that lose election, play the role of opposition to the party in power.
6. Parties shape public opinion. They raise and highlight issues. Parties sometimes also launch movements for the resolution of the problem faced by the people.
7. Political parties provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes. It is easy for the public to approach their local party leader than, a government officer. The local party leader has to listen to the public demand, otherwise people can reject them in the next elections.

**Note** Election Commission has officially banned wall writing by parties during election times. Most political parties argue that it was the cheapest way for their campaign. The trend of making amazing wall graffiti on the walls related to elections was prevalent in South Indian states like Tamil Nadu.

**Opposition** The political party or a group of parties that is a part of the Legislature, but not a part of the government, is known as opposition. They criticise and check the activities of the government.

**Necessity of Political Parties:** Political parties are needed because they perform variety of functions. Modern democracies cannot exist without political parties. The necessity of political parties can be imagined by a situation without parties. Without existence of parties, following situations may occur:

- Every candidate in the elections will be independent. No one will be able to make any promises to the people about any major policy changes.

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- The government may be formed, but its utility will remain ever uncertain. Elected representatives will be accountable to their constituency for what they do in the locality. But no one will be responsible for how the country will be run.

**An Example of Non-Party Based Election:** The Panchayat elections are non-party based elections to the Panchayat in many states of India. Although, the parties do not contest formally, it is generally noticed that the village gets split into more than one group, each of which puts up a 'panel' of its candidates. The above example states exactly what the party does. That is the reason the political parties are in almost all countries of the world, whether these countries are big or small, old or new, developed or developing. They needed a mechanism to support or restrain the government, make policies, justify or oppose them. Political parties fulfil these needs that every representative government has. Thus, political parties are a necessary condition for a democracy.

**Political Party Systems:** The different countries around the world opt different party systems. Broadly, political party system can be divided into three categories.

- **One-Party System** In this party system, only one party is allowed to control and run the government. China has one-party system. This system is not a good option for democracy. An ideal democratic system must allow at least two parties to compete. This provides a fair chance for competing parties to gain power.
- **Two-Party System** In this party system, two parties have a serious chance to win majority and form government. The power usually changes between two main parties. The United States of America and United Kingdom are the examples of two-party system.
- **Multi-Party System** In this party system, more than two political parties contest election to gain power. In India there is a multi-party system with more than 750 parties registered by the Election Commission. But only a few parties are in a race to the election and form government. This system often appears very complex and lead to political instability. It also allows a variety of interest and opinions to enjoy political representation.

**Coalition of Parties:** In India, government is formed by various parties coming together in a coalition. When several parties in a multi-party system join hands for the purpose of contesting and winning, it is called alliance or front.....

**Ideal Party System:** It cannot be judged that which party system is the ideal one as party system cannot be chosen. It evolves over a long time, depending on the nature of society, its social and regional divisions, its history of politics and its system of elections. India has multi-party system. The social and geographical diversity of our country is not easily absorbed by two or even three parties. No particular system is ideal for all countries.

**Popular Participation in political Parties:** these parties are facing crisis of unpopularity and indifference among the citizens. The evidence, based on a series of large sample surveys conducted over several decades, shows that:

- Political parties do not enjoy much trust among the people in South Asia. The proportion of those who say their trust in political parties is 'not much' or 'not at all' is more than those who have 'some' or 'great' trust.
- Political parties are one of the least trusted institutions all over the world. Yet the level of participation in the activities of political parties is fairly high.
- The proportion of those who say that they are members of some political party is higher in India than many advanced countries like Canada, Japan, Spain and South Korea.



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- Over the last three decades, the proportion of those who report to be members of political parties in India has gone up steadily.
- The proportion of those who say that they feel ‘close to a political party’ has also gone up in India in this period.

**Types of Political Parties:** Democracies that follow a federal system all over the world tend to have two kinds of political parties: parties that are present in only one of the federal units (State parties) and parties that are present in several or all units of the federation (National parties). This is the case in India as well. In India, there are both national parties and state parties. Every party in the country has to register with the Election Commission.

**National Political Parties:** A Party that secures at least 6% of the total votes in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in 4 states and wins at least 4 seats in the Lok Sabha, is recognized as a National party. The commission treats all parties equally, but it offers some special facilities to large and established parties. These parties are given a unique symbol - only the official candidates of that party can use that election symbol. Parties that get this privilege and some other special facilities are ‘recognized’ by the Election Commission for this purpose. That is why; these parties are called ‘recognized political parties’.

**Some important National Political Parties of India:** - In 2006, there were six recognized national political parties in the country. These are:

1. **Indian National Congress (INC)** It is popularly known as the Congress Party which is one of the oldest parties of the world. Founded in 1885, the congress party played a dominant role in Indian politics for several decades after India’s independence. It is a centrist party (neither rightist nor leftist) in its ideological orientation, the party supports secularism and welfare of weaker sections and minorities.
2. **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)** It was founded in 1980, by reviving the erstwhile Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The aim of the party is to build a strong and modern India by drawing inspiration from India’s ancient culture and values. It came to the power in 1998 as the leader of the National Democratic Alliance including several state and regional parties.
3. **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)** It was founded in 1984, under the leadership of Kanshi Ram. Seeks to represent and secure power for the Bahujan Samaj, which includes the Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs and religious minorities. It stands to secure interests and welfare of the dalits and oppressed people.
4. **Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M)** It was founded in 1964. It believes in Marxism-Leninism. Supports socialism, secularism and democracy and opposes imperialism and communalism. Accepts democratic elections as a useful and helpful means for securing the objective of socioeconomic justice in India.
5. **Communist Party of India (CPI)** Founded in 1925, it believes in Marxism-Leninism, secularism and democracy. Opposed to the forces of secessionism and communalism. Accepts parliamentary democracy as a means of promoting the interests of the working class, farmers and the poor.
6. **Nationalist Congress Party (NCP)** Founded in 1999, following a split in the Congress Party. It supports democracy, Gandhian secularism, equity, social justice and federalism.

**Note:** BJP won the 2014 Lok Sabha election and formed the Government.

**State Parties:** A party that secures at least 6% of the total votes in an election to the Legislative Assembly of a state and wins at least 2 seats is recognized as a state party. e.g. All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), All India Forward Bloc



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(AIFB), All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (JKNC), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), etc. These are commonly referred to as regional parties. Still such parties need not be regional in their ideology or outlook.

**State Parties with National Level Organization:** Some of the regional parties are all India parties that happen to have succeeded only in some states. Parties like the Samajwadi Party, Samata Party and Rashtriya Janata Dal have national level political organisation with units in several states. Some of these parties like Biju Janata Dal, Sikkim Democratic

Front and Mizo National Front are conscious about their state identity.

**Status of State Parties:** Over the last three decades, the number and strength of these parties has expanded. This made the Parliament of India politically more and more diverse. No national party is able to secure on its own a majority in Lok Sabha. As a result, the national parties are compelled to form alliances with state parties. Since 1996, nearly every of the state parties have got an opportunity to be a part of one or the other national level Coalition Government. This has contributed to the strengthening of federalism and democracy in our country.

**Challenges to political parties:** All over the world, people are dissatisfied with the performance of the political parties. This is the case in our country too. Popular dissatisfaction and criticism has focused on four problem areas in the working of political parties. Political parties need to face and overcome these challenge.

**First Challenge: Lack of Internal Democracy within Parties:** In the most of the political parties, the power is concentrated in the hands of one or few leaders at the top. Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information about the happenings inside the party. Parties do not conduct internal elections regularly. More than loyalty to party principles and policies, personal loyalty to the leader becomes more important. As a result, the leaders assume greater power to make decisions in the name of the party. Due to all these reason, political parties face this challenge.

**Second Challenge: Dynastic Succession:** The top positions in many political parties are generally controlled by members of one family. Leaders on the top have unfair chance of favouring their families and friends. This is also bad for democracy, since people who do not have adequate experience or popular support, come to occupy positions of power.

This tendency is present in some measure all over the world, including in some of the older democracies.

**Third Challenge: Money and Muscle Power:** This is a prominent challenge to political parties during elections. Since parties are focused only on winning elections, they tend to use shortcuts to win elections. Such shortcuts include: a) they tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money. b) Rich people and companies who give funds to the parties tend to have influence on the policies and decisions of the party.

In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections.

**Fourth Challenge: Meaningful Choice to the Voters:** It states that very often parties do not seem to offer a meaningful choice to the voters. In order to offer meaningful choice, parties must be significantly different. For example, in our country too, the differences among all the major parties on the economic policies have reduced. Those who want really different policies have no option available to them. Sometimes, people cannot even elect very different leaders as the same set of leaders keep changing from one party to another.



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**Reformation of Political Parties:** In order to face the challenges, political parties need to be reformed. Some of the recent efforts and suggestions in our country to reform the political parties are

- **Anti-Defection Law:** According to this law, MLAs or MPs cannot change the party after the election. If any MLA or MP changes parties, he or she will lose the seat in the Legislature. This was done because many elected representatives were indulging in defection in order to become ministers or for cash rewards. This new law has helped bring defection down. MPs and MLAs have to accept whatever their party leaders decide.
- **Details of Property and Criminal Cases:** In order to reduce the influence of money and criminals, the Supreme Court of our country passed an order. Now, it becomes mandatory for every candidate who contests elections to file an affidavit giving details of his property and criminal cases pending against him. But there is no system to check if the information given by the candidate is true or not.
- **File an Income Tax Return:** The Election Commission passed an order making it necessary for political parties to hold their organizational elections and file their income tax returns. The parties have started doing so but sometimes, it is mere formality.

**Other Suggestions of Reformation of Political Parties:**

- A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of political parties. It should be made compulsory for political parties to maintain a register of its members, to follow its own constitution, to have an independent authority, to act as a judge in case of party disputes and to hold open elections to the highest posts.
  - It should be made mandatory for political parties to give a minimum number of tickets (about one-third) to women candidates. Similarly, there should be a quota for women in the decision-making bodies of the party.
  - There should be state funding of elections. The government should give parties money to support their election expenses.
- These suggestions have not yet been accepted by parties. If and when these are accepted, these could lead to some improvements. The problem of bad politics solved by better politics.

There are two other ways in which political parties can be reformed:

- People can put pressure on political parties through petitions, publicity and agitations. If political parties feel that it would lose public support, it would become more serious about reforms.
- Political parties can improve if those who want this, join political parties. The quality of democracy will improve the degree of public participation and awareness.

