

## **POLITICAL PARTIES**

One of the features of the democracy is political parties. **A political party** is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the government. Parties are about a part of the society and thus involve partisanship.  
Partisan: A person who is strongly committed to a party, group or fraction.

A political party has **three components**

1. The leaders.
2. The active members and
3. The followers.

Functions of a political party:

1. **Contest elections**: In most democracies, elections are fought mainly among the candidates put up by political parties. In some countries members and supporters of a party select its candidates. E.g. U.S.A. In India, top leaders of the concerned party choose their candidates.

2. **Different policies and programmes**: Parties have different policies and programmes and voters choose from them. Each of us may have different opinions and views on what policies are suitable for the society. A party reduces a vast multitude of opinions into a few basic positions which it supports.

3. **Role in making laws for a country**: Formally, laws are debated and passed in the legislature

4 **Form and run governments**. Parties recruit leaders, train them and then make them ministers to run the government in the way they want.

5. **Role of Opposition**: The parties that lose elections form the opposition and voice different views and criticise government for their failures or wrong policies.

6. **Shape public opinion**: Parties raise and highlight issues. They launch movements for the resolution of problems faced by people. Opinions in the society crystallize on the lines parties take.

7. **Access to government machinery and welfare schemes**: Parties provide people access to government machinery and welfare schemes implemented by governments. The local party leader acts as a link between the people and the government officer.

### **Need for political parties.**

We need political parties because they perform all its functions.

1. Elected representatives will be accountable to their constituency. If there were no political parties then all candidates in an election would become independent candidates. They cannot promise any major policy change to the people.
2. The rise of political parties is directly linked to the emergence of representative democracies. In large societies like India only representative democracy can work. Political parties become an agency to gather different views on various issues and present them to the government.
3. Political parties needed to bring various representatives together so that a responsible government could be formed. They needed mechanism to support or restrain the government, make policies justify or oppose them.

Political parties are necessary condition for a democracy.

## *How many Parties should we have?*

### PARTY SYSTEM

1. **One Party System**: In some countries only one party is allowed to control and run the government. There is no competition in this system. The lone party nominates the candidates. This system is popular in Communist countries like China, Cuba, and North Korea. Voters do not have choice and freedom in this system. This is not a democratic option.
2. **Two- Party system**: In some countries, power usually changes between two main parties. The United States of America and the United Kingdom are examples of two party system.
3. **Multi- Party system** : If several parties compete for power, and more than two parties have a reasonable chance of coming to power either on their own strength or in alliance with others.

**Coalition government** : When no party gains a simple majority to form a government in a multi party system many parties join hand and form government. The present UPA ( United Progressive Alliance) government in India is an example.

Major Political Alliances in India : UPA , NDA ( National Democratic Alliance) and Left Front.

Each country develops a party system that is conditioned by its special circumstances ( nature of society, social and regional divisions etc). For example, India has evolved a multi-party system because the social and geographical diversity in such large country. It cannot be easily absorbed by one or two parties. No system is ideal for all countries and all situations.

**National Political Parties**: Every party in the country has to register with the Election Commission. The 'recognised political parties' are given a unique symbol. Only the official candidates of that party can use that election symbol. A party that secures at least six percent of total votes in Lok Sabha elections or Assembly elections in four states and wins at least four seats in the Lok Sabha is recognised as a national party.

Important national parties are-

**Indian National Congress (INC)**: Founded in 1885. It is a centrist party (neither leftist nor rightist) currently leads the ruling UPA coalition government at the centre. Hand is the election symbol of the party.

**Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P)**: Founded in 1980. The party wants full territorial and political integration of J & K and a uniform civil code. Lotus is the election symbol of the party. It is the principal opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), Communist Party of India -Marxist (CPI-M), Communist Party of India (CPI) and National Congress Party (NCP) are other national Parties.

**State Political Parties**. Other than the six national parties are classified as state parties or regional parties. A party that secures at least six percent of the total votes in an election to the legislative Assembly of a state and wins at least two seats is recognised as a state party. e.g. Rashtriya Janata Dal , Samajwadi Party , Telugu Desam etc. Recently the number and strength of the regional parties has expanded. This made the parliament of India politically more and more diverse.

### **Challenges to Political Parties:**

Popular dissatisfaction and criticism has focused on four problem areas in the working political parties.

1. **Lack of internal democracy within parties:** It is a tendency in the political parties towards the concentration of power in one or few leaders at the top. Parties do not conduct internal elections regularly. Ordinary members of the party do not get sufficient information on what happens inside the party.
2. **Dynastic succession:** In many parties, the top positions are always controlled by members of one family. This is unfair to other members of that party. This is also bad for democracy, since people do not have adequate experience or popular support come to occupy position of power.
3. **Growing role of money and muscle power:** Political parties tend to nominate those candidates who have or can raise lots of money. In some cases, parties support criminals who can win elections.
4. **Do not offer a meaningful choice to the voters:** In recent years there has been a decline in the ideological differences among parties. The differences on the economic policies have reduced. Sometimes people cannot even elect very different leaders either, because the same set of leaders keep shifting from one party to another.

### **How can parties be reformed?**

In order to face the challenges, political parties need to be reformed. Some of the recent efforts to reform political parties and its leaders are the following:

- **Anti-defection Act:** The constitution was amended to prevent elected MLAs and MPs from changing parties. Now the law says that if any MLA or MP changes parties, he or she will lose the seat in the legislature. This law brought defection down.
- **Order of the Supreme Court:** The Supreme Court of India passed an order to reduce the influence of money and criminals. Now, it is mandatory for every candidate who contests elections to file an **affidavit** giving details of his property and criminal cases pending against him. The new system has made a lot of information available to the public.
- **Guidelines from the Election Commission:** The election Commission passed an order making necessary for political parties to hold their organizational elections and file their income tax return.

### **Suggestions:**

- **Law to regulate the internal affairs of parties:** A law should be made to regulate the internal affairs of political parties. There should be an independent authority to act as a judge in case of party dispute and to hold open elections to the highest posts.
- **State funding:** There should be state funding of elections. The government should give parties money to support their election expenses to reduce the role of money and muscle power in politics.
- **One third reservation for women:** It should be made mandatory for political parties to give a minimum number of tickets to women candidates. It should be compulsory to give one third seats to women candidates.

Political parties can improve if they allow more and more people to join their organisation. The quality of democracy improves if there is maximum participation by the public..