

Why do we need Political Parties?

- »» Parties are most visible institutions in a democracy.
- »» For ordinary citizens, parties = democracy
- »» They know nothing about Constitution or govt., but know something about PARTIES.
- »» People even blame parties for democratic wrongs or political life.
- »» Parties have become identified with social and political divisions.
- »» ~~S~~, 100 years ago, there were few countries with any party. Now, there are few countries without any party.
- »» So, it's natural to want to know about importance.

Meaning

- »» A political party is a group of people who come together to contest elections and hold power in the govt.
- »» Members agree on policies / programmes promote collective good ↵
- »» Different views on what's "good" → Different ideologies of parties
- »» Parties try to :
 1. persuade people that their policies are better than others

2. implement policies by winning support through elections.

»» Thus, parties reflect political divisions and involve PARTISANSHIP.

↓

»» Parties are known by:

- which part they stand for
- which policies they support
- whose interests they uphold

Components of a Political Party

1. LEADERS
2. ACTIVE MEMBERS
3. FOLLOWERS

Functions of Parties

»» Parties fill political offices and exercise power by doing the following.

1. Parties Contest elections

»» Candidates of parties are voted in elections

»» Parties select candidates in diff. ways

- Countries like USA - Members and supporters of party choose candidates
- India - Top party leaders choose them

2. Parties put forward policies and programmes and voters choose from them.

»» Diff. people have diff. views, but govt. can't handle all of them.

»» So, parties formulate policies by grouping large no. of similar opinions.

- »» Parties reduce vast opinions in basic positions which it supports.
- »» Govt. policies are based upon the RULING PARTY.

3. Parties play a decisive role in making laws for a country.

- »» Laws are debated and passed in the legislature.
- »» The members go by party leadership, not their personal opinions.

4. Parties form and run governments.

- »» Parties recruit leaders → train them → make them ministers to run govt.
- »» Decisions are taken by political executive

5. Lost parties play the role of opposition to the parties in power.

- »» They voice diff. views and criticise govt. for failures or wrong policies.

6. Parties shape public opinion.

- »» They raise and highlight issues
- »» Lakhs of members and activists spread across country
- »» Many pressure groups are extensions of political parties
- »» Parties also launch movements.
- »» Opinions are built upon parties' actions.

7. Parties provide access to people for govt. machinery and welfare schemes.

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»» For ordinary citizens, party leaders seem more approachable than a govt. officer.

»» People are close to parties

»» Parties have to be responsive of needs and demands to remain in power.

Summary of Functions of Parties (short key points)

1. Contest elections

2. Formulate policies and programmes

3. Make laws, take decisions

4. Form and run govt.

5. Opposition (if lost)

6. Shape public opinion

7. Provide access to govt. machinery and welfare schemes to people

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Necessity

»» Parties perform some of the major functions (listed above)

»» But → Why democracies can't exist without parties?

Imagine a situation with no parties

- Candidates are independent. → So, no promises to people about major policy changes.

- Govt. formed, but utility remains uncertain

- Representatives can do good in their locality BUT no one will be responsible for whole country's administration.

»» Parties are necessary for promises in policies, certainty of governance, and for country's run. (not just localities)

- » Another eg - Non-party based panchayat elections
 - In villages' elections, the village gets split into different parts
 - Each part puts up a 'panel' of candidates

This is what parties do.

- » Parties present candidates, divide country into constituencies and represent people
- » Rise of political parties → Emergence of representative democracies

Representative democracy
Exact NEED of parties

1. Gather different and complex views of societies on various issues
2. Presenting views of citizens to government.
3. Bring various representatives together to form a responsible govt.
4. Serve as a mechanism to:
 - support or restrain govt
 - make policies
 - justify or oppose policies

How Many Parties Should We Have?

» More than 750 parties are registered with the Election Commission of India.



But not all contest elections
 Only few parties effectively race to win elections

One-Party System

- » Only one party is allowed to control and run the govt.
- » Example - China (Communist Party)
- » People form parties, but the system does not support free competition for power.

Not a good option, because:

- It is not democratic ↴
- In democracy, at least two parties should compete and there must be fair chance to come in power for all.

Two-Party System

- » Power usually changes between two main parties
- » Many other parties can ~~enter~~ contest in elections and win a few seats in legislature,
- » But only two parties have a chance to win majority and form govt.
- » Examples - USA, UK.

Multi-Party System

- » Several parties compete for power, and more than two parties have a reasonable chance of coming to power (by their own or with alliance)
- » Govt. is formed in coalition.
- » Alliance / Front - Several parties join hands to contest in elections.
- » Example - INDIA

2004 elections

Three major alliances

1. National Democratic Alliance (NDA)
2. United Progressive Alliance (UPA)
3. Left Front

Multi-party System

- cons • messy ; political instability
- pros • allows variety of interests and opinions to enjoy political representation.



Which system is better?

- Party system cannot be 'chosen',
- It evolves over a long time, depending upon:
 - nature of society
 - social & regional divisions
 - history of politics
 - system of elections

These factors cannot be changed quickly.

- So, countries' party system depends on its circumstances.

Example - India has multi-party system due to social and geographical diversity.

∴ There is no "ideal" system for all countries and all situations.

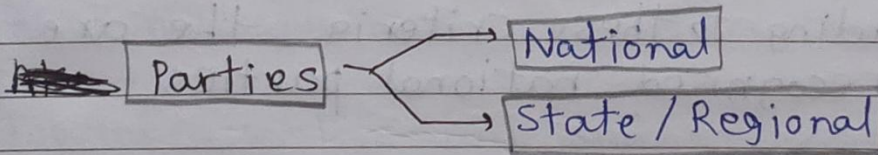
»» There is no "better" or "ideal" system. It depends on various factors (society, history, etc) and country's situation.

Popular Participation in political parties

- »» Parties do not enjoy much trust among people in South Asia. They are least trusted all over the world.
- »» Yet, in India, proportion of people participating in activities of political parties is high.
- »» Other increased proportions:
 - members of political parties
 - people feeling 'close' to parties

NATIONAL PARTIES

- Two kinds of political parties: (India too)
1. Present in only ONE of the federal units
 2. Present in SEVERAL or ALL federal units



National Parties

- »» Country-wide parties
- »» Units in various states
- »» All units follow same policies, programmes and strategy decided at national level.
- »» Every party has to register with Election Commission.
- »» EC treats all parties equally, but large and established parties get some special features.

- Parties are given a unique symbol, which can only be used by official candidates of that party.
- These special parties are 'recognised' by EC ⇒ known as recognised political parties

EC Criteria to be a RECOGNISED Party

State Party

National Party

At least 6% of total votes in a Legislative Assembly election of a State

At least 6% of total votes in Lok Sabha elections
OR

Win at least 2 seats



According to these criteria, there are 6 recognised national parties (as of 2023)

- Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)
- Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)
- Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
- Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M)
- Indian National Congress (INC)
- National People's Party (NPP)

Detailed info in TB
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STATE PARTIES

» also known as 'regional parties'

- Examples -
- Samajwadi Party
 - Rashtriya Janata Dal } several states
 - Biju Janata Dal
 - Sikkim Democratic Front
 - Mizo National Front } single state identity
 - Telangana Rashtra Samiti

TB page 56 for more

» It's difficult for national parties to secure own majority, so they form alliances with state parties.

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Strengthening of federalism & democracy

CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL PARTIES

- » Parties are the most visible face of democracy → So, people blame parties for whatever is wrong in democracy
- » Popular dissatisfaction and criticism focused on four areas.

1. Lack of Internal Democracy (within parties)

- » Concentration of power among FEW leaders
 - » No membership registers
 - » No organisational meetings
 - » No internal elections
- } necessary, but not present
- » Ordinary members do not get sufficient information ↓
- » They do not have connections to influence decisions.

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- »» People who are against the leader's decision cannot continue in the party. Loyalty to leader matters more than loyalty to party principles and policies.

2. Dynastic Succession

- »» No transparency
- »» Leaders unfairly favour close people or even family members.
- »» Top positions are controlled by members of one family
- »» So, ordinary people, even if worthy, cannot rise to top.
- »» People with no experience or support can hold power just because of connections.

3. Role of money and muscle power

- »» Parties use "short-cuts" to win elections
- »» Candidates with lots of money are nominated
- »» Rich people/companies give funds to parties and influence decisions.
- »» Even criminals are supported, (who can win elections)

4. No meaningful choice

- »» Parties must be different
- »» There is a decline in ideological differences
- »» Example - (Britain) Labour Party & Conservative Party (little difference)
- Agree on fundamental aspects

- Differ only in policies' framework and implementation

- »» India - differences in economic policies is reduced, no different options available
- »» Leaders keep shifting from one party to another → No differences in leaders either

HOW CAN PARTIES BE REFORMED?

- »» Leaders can be changed, but what if all of them are NOT WILLING to reform?

Recent efforts to reform parties and leaders

1. Constitutional amendment to prevent DEFECTION

»» Prevents MLAs and MPs from changing parties

① • Initially - Representatives indulged in defection for → becoming ministers OR → getting cash rewards

② • The law - Any MLA or MP that changed party will lose seats

③ • Outcomes:

1. Defection reduced

④ • Lacks: { 2. Dissent became difficult

3. MLAs and MPs have to accept what leaders decide

2. Supreme Court order to reduce influence of money and criminals.

- ① • Initially - money and power used unjustly for elections (largely)
- ② • The law - Every candidate must file an affidavit, giving details of property and criminal cases
- ③ • Outcome - Transparency and availability of information
- ④ • Disadvantages / Lacks:
 - 1. No systems to ~~check~~ check if the info is true
 - 2. No evidence that it has led to a decline in influence of the rich or the criminals.

3. The Election Commission order for internal democracy

- ① • The Law - Parties have to:
 - hold organisational election
 - file income tax returns
- ② • Outcome - Parties follow the Law, but sometimes, only for formality.
- ③ • Lack - Not clear if it actually led

Suggestions to reform parties (should be done)

1. Law to regulate internal affairs

- »» Compulsory for parties to: maintain a register
- parties must do this
- maintain register of members
 - follow its own constitution
 - have an independent authority
 - act as judge in party disputes
 - hold open elections

2. Increase in women participation

- »» Parties should give $\frac{1}{3}$ rd of tickets to women candidates
- »» There should be quota for women in decision-making.

3. State funding of elections

- »» Govt. should give money to parties to support election expenses.
- »» Can be given in kind:
- petrol | • paper | • telephone, etc.
- or cash

[kind or cash: based on votes in last election]

4. People's Pressure (citizens, pressure groups, movements)

- »» Through petitions, publicity and agitations
- »» This makes party feel that it will lose public support, so they become serious about reforms.

5. People willing to reform join parties

- »» Democracy is about public participation

» Citizens should participate, instead of just criticising.

Challenges with reforms

- » We must be careful about legal solutions
- » Over-regulation will force parties to cheat the law
- » Parties won't agree to pass a law they don't like

At some places, the notes are left incomplete (the phrases are not complete). I apologise for it. You'll find them in the textbook.